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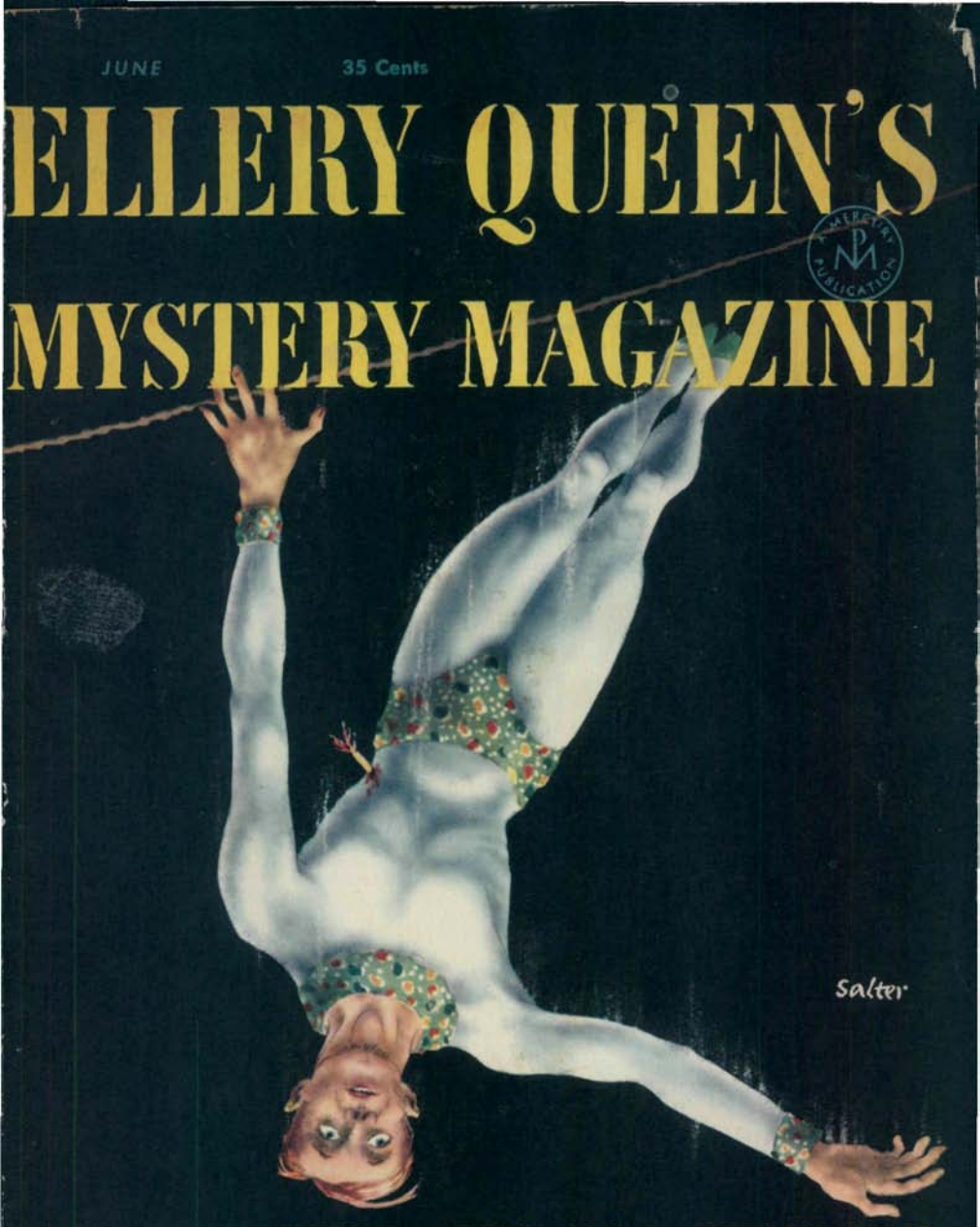

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AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

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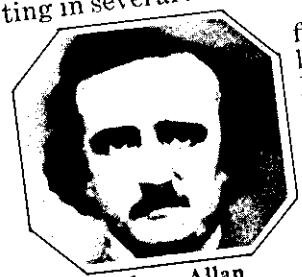
From the newspaper with the largest circulation in the U.S.

SUNDAY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER
February 8, 1953

SOME LITERARY HERESY, FOLKS

We feel an urge at the moment to fire up the tempers of numerous literary double-domes and intellectual book reviewers by putting in several kind words for the modern murder story, or whodunit.



Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49)

It's a relatively new form of fiction. The first detective or mystery stories read by large numbers of people were produced by Edgar Allan Poe, who died a little over 100 years ago.

Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle advanced the art a long way in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Nowadays, as we started out to say, the mystery yarn is as plentiful as the newsstands where it is mostly sold, and an important item in the book publishing business.

In our opinion, that isn't all it is, by a long shot. We think some of the best writing today is being done by mystery writers.

Further, these people's books have real meat in them — action, suspense, humor frequently, brilliant character portrayal, weird and wonderful settings and scenery. They stir your imagination, and satisfy the age-old human appetite for a good story.

Hence, we think the mystery novel is as worthy of critics' serious attention as any other kind of novel.

We're growing damned tired of the patronizing treatment it gets from most book reviewers; and we hereby move that these gents and ladies treat it as respectfully from now on as they do the books of "serious" novelists.

It's a very serious job to write a good murder story, as anyone who ever tried is well aware. If you succeed, you've produced something that contributes to the sum total of human happiness, without lugging in any messages or social significance or propaganda. That's a real achievement.

. . . and for the best in mystery fiction read these Mercury Publications:

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DR. CARL JUNG

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"When Jung [founder of analytical psychology] is not pondering the relation of modern man to his soul, he is apt to be found sailing a small ketch on the Lake of Zurich, or reading an endless chain of violent detective stories, sometimes at the rate of one a day." *

Dr. Jung, one of the most celebrated students of the human mind, thus joins the company of such leaders of world thought as Bertrand Russell, Ivor Brown, Harold U. Nicolson, and scores of others who find relaxation from the strain of this atomic age in the reading of detective stories.

IT'S SMART TO READ MYSTERIES
IT'S ALSO GOOD FOR YOUR PEACE OF MIND

** From TIME, July 7, 1952.*

HAROLD NICOLSON

noted British biographer, novelist and diplomat, writing in The Spectator

"I have often endeavored . . . to communicate to others the comfort and the relaxation that I obtain from the reading of detective fiction. . . . When anxiety or worry comes to quicken the pulse, or a bout of overwork renders it sluggish, then is the moment to slide one of the slim volumes into the overcoat pocket, and to transport oneself for awhile into a world of adventure, ingenuity and daring."

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WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE

All the writers we have ever known (at least, all of them with a spark of "romance" in their creative souls) have had a compulsion to do a story based on the theme of chivalry — perhaps for no other reason than to prove, in modern terms, that chivalry is not dead. Stanley Ellin is no exception to this general rule, and his romantic spark was vital enough to ignite something in his mind that eventually became an Idea. It all started one day when he and his daughter were discussing knighthood and deeds of derring-do and that golden age when knights in shining armor rode off to battle for their ladies' honor. It was in that man-to-woman talk that "The Betrayers" was born.

Of course, the plot went through many changes before it took final shape. But through all its transformations the protagonist — a modern knight — remained true to Mr. Ellin's original conception: "a ghost of all the Galahads before him." Thus one modern detective story evolved: it had begun in Mr. Ellin's memory of an ancient castle, dating back to 800 A.D., and ended in a contemporary apartment house, dated 1952 A.D. — more than a century of transition to achieve a 'tec theme!

THE BETRAYERS

by STANLEY ELLIN

BETWEEN THEM WAS A WALL. AND since it was only a flimsy, jerry-built partition, a sounding board between apartments, Robert came to know the girl that way.

At first she was the sound of footsteps, the small firm rap of high heels moving in a pattern of activity around her room. She must be very young, he thought idly, because at the time he was deep in *Green Mansions*, pursuing the lustrous Rima through a labyrinth of Amazonian jungle. Later he came to know her voice, light and breathless when she spoke, warm and gay when she raised it in chorus to some popular song dinning from her radio. She must be very lovely, he thought then, and after that found himself listening deliberately, and falling more and more in love with her as he listened.

Her name was Amy, and there was a husband, too, a man called Vince who had a flat, unpleasant voice, and a sullen way about him. Occasionally there were quarrels which the man invariably ended by slam-

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ming the door of their room and thundering down the stairs as loud as he could. Then she would cry, a smothered whimpering, and Robert, standing close to the wall between them, would feel as if a hand had been thrust inside his chest and was twisting his heart. He would think wildly of the few steps that would take him to her door, the few words that would let her know he was her friend, was willing to do something — anything — to help her. Perhaps, meeting face to face, she would recognize his love. Perhaps —

So the thoughts whirled around and around, but Robert only stood there, taut with helplessness.

And there was no one to confide in, which made it that much harder. The only acquaintances he numbered in the world were the other men in his office, and they would never have understood. He worked, prosaically enough, in the credit department of one of the city's largest department stores, and too many years there had ground the men around him to a fine edge of cynicism. The business of digging into people's records, of searching for the tax difficulties, the clandestine affairs with expensive women, the touch of larceny in every human being — all that was bound to have an effect, they told Robert, and if he stayed on the job much longer he'd find it out for himself.

What would they tell him now? *A pretty girl next door? Husband's away most of the time? Go on, make yourself at home!*

How could he make them understand that that wasn't what he was looking for? That what he wanted was someone to meet his love halfway, someone to put an end to the cold loneliness that settled in him like a stone during the dark hours each night.

So he said nothing about it to anyone, but stayed close to the wall, drawing from it what he could. And knowing the girl as he had come to, he was not surprised when he finally saw her. The mail for all the apartments was left on a table in the downstairs hallway, and as he walked down the stairs to go to work that morning, he saw her take a letter from the table and start up the stairway toward him.

There was never any question in his mind that this was the girl. She was small and fragile and dark-haired, and all the loveliness he had imagined in her from the other side of the wall was there in her face. She was wearing a loose robe, and as she passed him on the stairway she pulled the robe closer to her breast and slipped by almost as if she were afraid of him. He realized with a start that he had been staring unashamedly, and with his face red he turned down the stairs to the street. But he walked the rest of his way in a haze of wonderment.

He saw her a few times after that, always under the same conditions, but it took weeks before he mustered enough courage to stop at the foot of the stairs and turn to watch her

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retreating form above: the lovely fine line of ankle, the roundness of calf, the curve of body pressing against the robe. And then as she reached the head of the stairs, as if aware he was watching her, she looked down at him and their eyes met.

For a heart-stopping moment Robert tried to understand what he read in her face, and then her husband's voice came flat and belligerent from the room. "Amy," it said, "what's holdin' you up!" — and she was gone, and the moment with her.

When he saw the husband he marveled that she had chosen someone like that. A small, dapper gamecock of a man, he was good-looking in a hard way, but with the skin drawn so tight over his face that the cheekbones jutted sharply and the lips were drawn into a thin menacing line. He glanced at Robert up and down out of the corners of blank eyes as they passed, and in that instant Robert understood part of what he had seen in the girl's face. This man was as dangerous as some half-tamed animal that would snap at any hand laid on him, no matter what its intent. Just being near him you could smell danger, as surely the girl did her every waking hour.

The violence in the man exploded one night with force enough to waken Robert from a deep sleep. It was not the pitch of the voice, Robert realized, sitting up half-dazed in bed, because the words were almost inaudible through the wall; it was the vicious intensity that was so frightening.

He slipped out of bed and laid his ear against the wall. Standing like that, his eyes closed while he strained to follow the choppy phrases, he could picture the couple facing each other as vividly as if the wall had dissolved before him.

"*So you know,*" the man said. "*So what?*"

". . . *getting out!*" the girl said.

"*And then tell everybody? Tell the whole world?*"

"*I won't!*" The girl was crying now. "*I swear I won't!*"

"*Think I'd take a chance?*" the man said, and then his voice turned soft and derisive. "*Ten thousand dollars,*" he said. "*Where else could I get it? Digging ditches?*"

"*Better that way! This way . . . I'm getting out!*"

His answer was not delivered in words. It came in the form of a blow so hard that when she reeled back and struck the wall, the impact stung Robert's face. "*Vince!*" she screamed, the sound high and quavering with terror. "*Don't, Vince!*"

Every nerve in Robert was alive now with her pain as the next blow was struck. His fingernails dug into the wall at the hard-breathing noises of scuffling behind it as she was pulled away.

"*Ahh, no!*" she cried out, and then there was the sound of a breath being drawn hoarsely and agonizingly into lungs no longer responsive to it, the thud of a flaccid weight striking

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the floor, and suddenly silence. A terrible silence.

As if the wall itself were her cold, dead flesh Robert recoiled from it, then stood staring at it in horror. His thoughts twisted and turned on themselves insanely, but out of them loomed one larger and larger so that he had to face it and recognize it.

She had been murdered, and as surely as though he had been standing there beside her he was a witness to it! He had been so close that if the wall were not there he could have reached out his hand and touched her. Done something to help her. Instead, he had waited like a fool until it was too late.

But there was still something to be done, he told himself wildly. And long as this madman in the next room had no idea there was a witness he could still be taken red-handed. A call to the police, and in five minutes . . .

But before he could take the first nerveless step Robert heard the room next door stealthily come to life again. There was a sound of surreptitious motion, of things being shifted from their place, then, clearly defined, a lifeless weight being pulled along the floor, and the cautious creaking of a door opened wide. It was that last sound which struck Robert with a sick comprehension of what was happening.

The murderer was a monster, but he was no fool. If he could safely dispose of the body now during these silent hours of the night he was, to all intents and purposes, a man who had committed no crime at all!

At his door Robert stopped short. From the hallway came the deliberate thump of feet finding their way down the stairs with the weight dragging behind them. The man had killed once. He was reckless enough in this crisis to risk being seen with his victim. What would such a man do to anyone who confronted him at such a time?

Robert leaned back against his door, his eyes closed tight, a choking constriction in his throat as if the man's hands were already around it. He was a coward, there was no way around it. Faced with the need to show some courage he had discovered he was a rank coward, and he saw the girl's face before him now, not with fear in it, but contempt.

But — and the thought gave him a quick sense of triumph — he could still go to the police. He saw himself doing it, and the sense of triumph faded away. He had heard some noises, and from that had constructed a murder. The body? There would be none. The murderer? None. Only a man whose wife had left him because he had quarreled with her. The accuser? A young man who had wild dreams. A perfect fool. In short, Robert himself.

It was only when he heard the click of the door downstairs that he stepped out into the hallway and started down, step by careful step. Halfway down he saw it, a handkerchief, small and crumpled and blotched with

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an ugly stain. He picked it up gingerly, and holding it up toward the dim light overhead let it fall open. The stain was bright sticky red almost obscuring in one corner the word *Amy* carefully embroidered there. Blood. *Her* blood. Wouldn't that be evidence enough for anyone?

Sure, he could hear the policeman answer him jeeringly, *evidence of a nose-bleed, all right*, and he could feel the despair churn in him.

It was the noise of the car that roused him, and then he flew down the rest of the stairs, but too late. As he pressed his face to the curtain of the front door the car roared away from the curb, its tail-lights gleaming like malevolent eyes, its license plate impossible to read in the dark. If he had only been an instant quicker, he raged at himself, only had sense enough to understand that the killer must use a car for his purpose, he could easily have identified it. Now, even that chance was gone. Every chance was gone.

He was in his room pacing the floor feverishly when within a half hour he heard the furtive sounds of the murderer's return. *And why not*, Robert thought; *he's gotten rid of her, he's safe now, he can go on as if nothing at all had happened.*

If I were only someone who could go into that room and beat the truth out of him, the thought boiled on, *or someone with such wealth or position that I would be listened to . . .*

But all that was as unreal and vaporous as his passion for the girl had been. What weapon of vengeance could he possibly have at his command, a nobody working in a . . .

Robert felt the sudden realization wash over him in a cold wave. His eyes narrowed on the wall as if, word by word, the idea were being written on it in a minute hand.

Everyone has a touch of larceny in him — wasn't that what the old hands in his department were always saying? Everyone was suspect. Certainly the man next door, with his bent for violence, his talk of ten thousand dollars come by in some unlikely way, must have black marks on his record that the authorities, blind as they might be, could recognize and act on. If someone skilled in investigation were to strip the man's past down, layer by layer, justice would have to be done. That was the weapon: the dark past itself, stored away in the man, waiting only to be ignited!

Slowly and thoughtfully Robert slipped the girl's crumpled handkerchief into an envelope and sealed it. Then, straining to remember the exact words, he wrote down on paper the last violent duologue between murderer and victim. Paper and envelope both went into a drawer of his dresser, and the first step had been taken.

But then, Robert asked himself, what did he know about the man? His name was Vince, and that was all. Hardly information which could serve as the starting point of a search through the dark corridors of some-

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one's past. There must be something more than that, something to serve as a lead.

It took Robert the rest of a sleepless night to hit on the idea of the landlady. A stout and sleepy-eyed woman whose only interest in life seemed to lie in the prompt collection of her rent, she still must have some information about the man. She occupied the rear apartment on the ground floor, and as early in the morning as he dared Robert knocked on her door.

She looked more sleepy-eyed than ever as she pondered his question. "Them?" she said at last. "That's the Sniders. Nice people, all right." She blinked at Robert. "Not having any trouble with them, are you?"

"No. Not at all. But is that all you can tell me about them? I mean, don't you know where they're from, or anything like that?"

The landlady shrugged. "I'm sure it's none of my business," she said loftily. "All I know is they pay on the first of the month right on the dot, and they're nice respectable people."

He turned away from her heavily, and as he did so saw the street door close behind the postman. It was as if a miracle had been passed for him. The landlady was gone, he was all alone with that little heap of mail on the table, and there staring up at him was an envelope neatly addressed to Mrs. Vincent Snider.

All the way to his office he kept that envelope hidden away in an inside pocket, and it was only when he was locked in the seclusion of his cubicle that he carefully slit it open and studied its contents. A single page with only a few lines on it, a noncommittal message about the family's well-being, and the signature: *Your sister, Celia.* Not much to go on — but wait, there was a return address on the stationery, an address in a small upstate town.

Robert hesitated only a moment, then thrust letter and envelope into his pocket, straightened his jacket, and walked into the office of his superior. Mr. Sprague, in charge of the department and consequently the most ulcerated and cynical member of it, regarded him dourly.

"Yes?" he said.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Robert, "but I'll need a few days off. You see, there's been a sudden death."

Mr. Sprague sighed at this pebble cast into the smooth pool of his department's routine, but his face fell into the proper sympathetic lines.

"Somebody close?"

"Very close," said Robert.

The walk from the railroad station to the house was a short one. The house itself had a severe and forbidding air about it, as did the young woman who opened the door in answer to Robert's knock.

"Yes," she said, "my sister's name is Amy Snider. Her married name, that is. I'm Celia Thompson."

"What I'm looking for," Robert said, "is some information about her. About your sister."

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The woman looked stricken. "Something's happened to her?"

"In a way," Robert said. He cleared his throat hard. "You see, she's disappeared from her apartment, and I'm looking into it. Now, if you . . ."

"You're from the police?"

"I'm acting for them," Robert said, and prayed that this ambiguity would serve in place of identification. The prayer was answered, the woman gestured him into the house, and sat down facing him in the bare and uninviting living room.

"I knew," the woman said, "I knew something would happen," and she rocked piteously from side to side in her chair.

Robert reached forward and touched her hand gently. "How did you know?"

"How? What else could you expect when you drive a child out of her home and slam the door in her face! When you throw her out into the world not even knowing how to take care of herself!"

Robert withdrew his hand abruptly. "You did *that?*"

"My father did it. *Her* father."

"But why?"

"If you knew him," the woman said. "A man who thinks anything pretty is sinful. A man who's so scared of hellfire and brimstone that he's kept us in it all our lives!

"When she started to get so pretty, and the boys pestering her all the time, he turned against her just like that. And when she had her trouble with that man he threw her out of the house, bag and baggage. And if he knew I was writing letters to her," the woman said fearfully, "he'd throw me out, too. I can't even say her name in front of him, the way he is."

"Look," Robert said eagerly, "that man she had trouble with. Was that the one she married? That Vincent Snider?"

"I don't know," the woman said vaguely. "I just don't know. Nobody knows except Amy and my father, the way it was kept such a secret. I didn't even know she was married until all of a sudden she wrote me a letter about it from the city."

"But if your father knows, I can talk to him about it."

"No! You can't! If he even knew I told you as much as I did . . ."

"But I can't let it go at that," he pleaded. "I have to find out about this man, and then maybe we can straighten everything out."

"All right," the woman said wearily, "there is somebody. But not my father, you've got to keep away from him for my sake. There's this teacher over at the high school, this Miss Benson. She's the one to see. And she liked Amy; she's the one Amy mails my letters to, so my father won't know. Maybe she'll tell you, even if she won't tell anybody else. I'll write you a note to her, and you go see her."

At the door he thanked her, and she regarded him with a hard, straight look. "You have to be pretty to get yourself in trouble," she said, "so

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it's something that'll never bother me. But you find Amy, and you make sure she's all right."

"Yes," Robert said. "I'll try."

At the school he was told that Miss Benson was the typewriting teacher, that she had classes until 3, and that if he wished to speak to her alone he would have to wait until then. So for hours he fretfully walked the few main streets of the town, oblivious of the curious glances of passers-by, and thinking of Amy. These were the streets she had known. These shop windows had mirrored her image. And, he thought with a sharp jealousy, not always alone. There had been boys. Attracted to her, as boys would be, but careless of her, never realizing the prize they had. But if he had known her then, if he could have been one of them . . .

At 3 o'clock he waited outside the school building until it had emptied, and then went in eagerly. Miss Benson was a small woman, gray-haired and fluttering, almost lost among the grim ranks of hooded typewriters in the room. After Robert had explained himself, and she had read Celia Thompson's note she seemed ready to burst into tears.

"It's wrong of her!" she said. "It's dreadfully wrong of her to send you to me. She must have known that."

"But why is it wrong?"

"Why? Because she knows I don't want to talk about it to anyone. She knows what it would cost me if I did, that's why!"

"Look," Robert said patiently, "I'm not trying to find out what happened. I'm only trying to find out about this man Amy had trouble with, what his name is, where he comes from, where I can get more information about him."

"No," Miss Benson quavered, "I'm sorry."

"Sorry," Robert said angrily. "A girl disappears, this man may be at the bottom of it, and all you can do is say you're sorry!"

Miss Benson's jaw went slack. "You mean that he — that he *did* something to her?"

"Yes," Robert said, "he did," and had to quickly catch her arm as she swayed unsteadily, apparently on the verge of fainting.

"I should have known," she said lifelessly. "I should have known when it happened that it might come to this. But at the time . . ."

At the time the girl had been one of her students. A good student — not brilliant, mind you — but a nice girl always trying to do her best. And well brought-up, too, not like so many of the young snips you get nowadays.

That very afternoon when it all happened the girl herself had told Miss Benson she was going to the Principal's office after school hours to get her program straightened out. Certainly if she meant to do anything wicked she wouldn't have mentioned that, would she? Wasn't that all the evidence anyone needed?

"Evidence?" Robert said in bewilderment.

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Yes, evidence. There had been that screaming in the Principal's office, and Miss Benson had been the only one left in the whole school. She had run to the office, flung open the door, and that was how she found them. The girl sobbing hysterically, her dress torn halfway down; Mr. Price standing behind her, glaring at the open door, at the incredulous Miss Benson.

"Mr. Price?" Robert said. He had the sense of swimming numbly through some gelatinous depths, unable to see anything clearly.

Mr. Price, the Principal, of course. He stood glaring at her, his face ashen. Then the girl had fled through the door and Mr. Price had taken one step after her, but had stopped short. He had pulled Miss Benson into the office, and closed the door, and then he had talked to her.

The long and the short of what he told her was that the girl was a wanton. She had waltzed into his office, threatened him with blackmail, and when he had put her into her place she had artfully acted out her little scene. But he would be merciful, very merciful. Rather than call in the authorities and blacken the name of the school and of her decent, respectable father he would simply expel her and advise her father to get her out of town promptly.

And, Mr. Price had remarked meaningfully, it was a lucky thing indeed that Miss Benson had walked in just in time to be his witness. Although if Miss Benson failed him as a witness it could be highly unlucky for her.

"And he meant it," Miss Benson said bitterly. "It's his family runs the town and everything in it. If I said anything of what I really thought, if I dared open my mouth, I'd never get another job anywhere. But I should have talked up, I know I should have, especially after what happened next!"

She had managed to get back to her room at the far end of the corridor although she had no idea of where she got the strength. And as soon as she had entered the room she saw the girl there, lying on the floor beneath the bulletin board from which usually hung the sharp, cutting scissors. But the scissors were in the girl's clenched fist as she lay there, and blood over everything. All that blood over everything.

"She was like that," Miss Benson said dully. "If you reprimanded her for even the littlest thing she looked like she wanted to sink through the floor, to die on the spot. And after what she went through it must have been the first thing in her head: just to get rid of herself. It was a mercy of God that she didn't succeed then and there."

It was Miss Benson who got the doctor, a discreet man who asked no questions, and it was she who tended the girl after her father had barred his door to her.

"And when she could get around," Miss Benson said, "I placed her with this office over at the county seat.

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She wasn't graduated, of course, or really expert, but I gave her a letter explaining she had been in some trouble and needed a helping hand, and they gave her a job."

Miss Benson dug her fingers into her forehead. "If I had only talked up when I should have. I should have known he'd never feel safe, that he'd hound her and hound her until he . . ."

"But he isn't the one!" Robert said hoarsely. "He isn't the right man at all!"

She looked at him wonderingly. "But you said . . ."

"No," Robert said helplessly, "I'm looking for someone else. A different man altogether."

She shrank back. "You've been trying to fool me!"

"I swear I haven't."

"But it doesn't matter," she whispered. "If you say a word about this nobody'll believe you. I'll tell them you were lying, you made the whole thing up!"

"You won't have to," Robert said. "All you have to do is tell me where you sent her for that job. If you do that you can forget everything else."

She hesitated, studying his face with bright, frightened eyes. "All right," she said at last. "All right."

He was about to go when she placed her hand anxiously on his arm. "Please," she said. "You don't think unkindly of me because of all this, do you?"

"No," Robert said, "I don't have the right to."

The bus trip which filled the remainder of the day was a wearing one, the hotel bed that night was no great improvement over the bus seat, and Mr. Pardee of *Grace, Grace, & Pardee* seemed to Robert the hardest of all to take. He was a cheery man, too loud and florid to be properly contained by his small office.

He studied Robert's business card with interest. "Credit research, eh?" he said admiringly. "Wonderful how you fellas track 'em down wherever they are. Sort of a Northwest Mounted Police just working to keep business healthy, that's what it comes to, doesn't it? And anything I can do to help . . ."

Yes, he remembered the girl very well.

"Just about the prettiest little thing we ever had around here," he said pensively. "Didn't know much about her job, of course, but you got your money's worth just watching her walk around the office."

Robert managed to keep his teeth clenched. "Was there any man she seemed interested in? Someone around the office, maybe, who wouldn't be working here any more? Or even someone outside you could tell me about?"

Mr. Pardee studied the ceiling with narrowed eyes. "No," he said, "nobody I can think of. Must have been plenty of men after her, but you'd never get anything out of her about it. Not with the way she was so secretive and all. Matter of fact,

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her being that way was one of the things that made all the trouble."

"Trouble?"

"Oh, nothing serious. Somebody was picking the petty cash box every so often, and what with all the rest of the office being so friendly except her it looked like she might be the one. And then that letter she brought saying she had already been in some trouble — well, we just had to let her go.

"Later on," continued Mr. Pardee pleasantly, "when we found out it wasn't her after all, it was too late. We didn't know where to get in touch with her." He snapped his fingers loudly. "Gone, just like that."

Robert drew a deep breath to steady himself. "But there must be somebody in the office who knew her," he pleaded. "Maybe some girl she talked to."

"Oh, that," said Mr. Pardee. "Well, as I said, she wasn't friendly, but now and then she did have her head together with Jenny Rizzo over at the switchboard. If you want to talk to Jenny go right ahead. Anything I can do to help . . ."

But it was Jenny Rizzo who helped him. A plain girl dressed in defiant bad taste, she studied him with impersonal interest and told him coolly that she had nothing to say about Amy. The kid had taken enough kicking around. It was about time they let her alone.

"I'm not interested in her," Robert said. "I'm trying to find out about the man she married. Someone named Vincent Snider. Did you know about him?"

From the stricken look on her face Robert realized exultantly that she did.

"Him!" she said. "So she went and married him, anyhow!"

"What about it?"

"What about it? I told her a hundred times he was no good. I told her just stay away from him."

"Why?"

"Because I know his kind. Sharp stuff hanging around with money in his pocket, you never knew where it came from. The kind of guy's always pulling fast deals, but he's too smart to get caught, that's why!"

"How well did you know him?"

"How well? I knew him from the time he was a kid around my neighborhood here. Look," Jenny dug into a desk drawer deep laden with personal possessions. She came out with a handful of snapshots which she thrust at Robert. "We even used to double-date together, Vince and Amy, and me and my boy friend. Plenty of times I told her right in front of Vince that he was no good, but he gave her such a line she wouldn't even listen. She was like a baby that way; anybody was nice to her she'd go overboard."

They were not good photographs, but there were Vince and Amy clearly recognizable.

"Could I have one of these?" Robert asked, his voice elaborately casual.

Jenny shrugged. "Just go ahead

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and help yourself," she said, and Robert did.

"Then what happened?" he said. "I mean, to Vince and Amy?"

"You got me there. After she got fired they both took off. She said something about Vince getting a job downstate a-ways, in Sutton, and that was the last I saw of them. I could just see him working at anything honest, but the way she said it she must have believed him. Anyhow, I never heard from her after that."

"Could you remember exactly when you saw her last? That time she told you they were going to Sutton?"

Jenny could and did. She might have remembered more, but Robert was out of the door by then, leaving her gaping after him, her mouth wide open in surprise.

The trip to Sutton was barely an hour by bus, but it took another hour before Robert was seated at a large table with the Sutton newspaper files laid out before him. The town's newspaper was a large and respectable one, its files orderly and well-kept. And two days after the date Jenny Rizzo had given him there was the news Robert had hoped to find. Headline news emblazoned all across the top of the first page.

Ten thousand dollars stolen, the news report said. A daring, lone bandit had walked into the Sutton Bank and Trust, had bearded the manager without a soul around knowing it, and had calmly walked out with a small valise containing ten thousand dollars in currency. The police were on the trail. An arrest was expected momentarily . . .

Robert traced through later dates with his hands shaking. The police had given up in their efforts. No arrest was ever made . . .

Robert had carefully scissored the photograph so that Vince now stood alone in the picture. The bank manager irritably looked at the picture, and then swallowed hard.

"It's him!" he told Robert incredulously. "That's the man! I'd know him anywhere. If I can get my hands on him . . ."

"There's something you'll have to do first," said Robert.

"I'm not making any deals," the manager protested. "I want him, and I want every penny of the money he's got left."

"I'm not talking about deals," Robert said. "All you have to do is put down on paper that you positively identify this man as the one who robbed the bank. If you do that the police'll have him for you tomorrow."

"That's all?" the man said suspiciously.

"That's all," Robert said.

He sat again in the familiar room, the papers, the evidence, arranged before him. His one remaining fear had been that in his absence the murderer had somehow taken alarm and fled. He had not breathed easy until the first small, surreptitious

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noises from next door made clear that things were as he had left them.

Now he carefully studied all the notes he had painstakingly prepared, all the reports of conversations held. It was all here, enough to see justice done, but it was more than that, he told himself bitterly. It was the portrait of a girl who, step by step, had been driven through a pattern of betrayal.

Every man she had dealt with had been an agent of betrayal. Father, school principal, employer, and finally her husband, each was guilty in his turn. Jenny Rizzo's words rang loud in Robert's ears.

Anybody was nice to her she'd go overboard. If he had spoken, if he had moved, he could have been the one. When she turned at the top of the stairs to look at him she might have been waiting for him to speak or move. Now it was too late, and there was no way of letting her know what these papers meant, what he had done for her . . .

The police were everything Robert had expected until they read the bank manager's statement. Then they read and reread the statement, they looked at the photograph, and they courteously passed Robert from hand to hand until finally there was a door marked *Lieutenant Kyserling*, and behind it a slender, soft-spoken man.

It was a long story — Robert had not realized until then how long it was or how many details there were to explain — but it was told from start to finish without interruption. At its conclusion Kyserling took the papers, the handkerchief, and the photograph, and pored over them. Then he looked at Robert curiously.

"It's all here," he said. "The only thing you left out is why you did it, why you went to all this trouble. What's your stake in this?"

It was not easy to have your most private dream exposed to a complete stranger. Robert choked on the words. "It's because of her. The way I felt about her."

"Oh." Kyserling nodded understandingly. "Making time with her?"

"No," Robert said angrily. "We never even spoke to each other!"

Kyserling tapped his fingers gently on the papers before him.

"Well," he said, "it's none of my business anyhow. But you've done a pretty job for us. Very pretty. Matter of fact, yesterday we turned up the body in a car parked a few blocks away from your place. The car was stolen a month ago, there wasn't a stitch of identification on the clothing or anything; all we got is a body with a big wound in it. This business could have stayed up in the air for a hundred years if it wasn't for you walking in with a perfect case made out from A to Z."

"I'm glad," Robert said. "That's the way I wanted it."

"Yeah," Kyserling said. "Any time you want a job on the force you just come and see me."

Then he was gone from the office for a long while, and when he returned it was in the company of a big, stolid

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plainclothesman who smiled grimly.

"We're going to wrap it up now," Kyserling told Robert, and gestured at the man.

They went softly up the stairs of the house and stood to the side of the door while Kyserling laid his ear against it for some assurance of sound. Then he briskly nodded to the plainclothesman and rapped hard.

"Open up!" he called. "It's the police."

There was an ear-ringing silence, and Robert's mouth went dry as he saw Kyserling and the plainclothesman slip the chill blue steel of revolvers from their shoulder holsters.

"I got no use for these cute little games," growled Kyserling, and suddenly raised his foot and smashed the heel of his shoe hard against the lock of the door. The door burst open, Robert cowered back against the balustrade of the staircase —

And then he saw her.

She stood in the middle of the room facing him wildly, the same look on her face, he knew in that fantastic moment, that she must have worn each time she came face to face with a betrayer exposed. Then she took one backward step, and suddenly whirled toward the window.

"*Ahh, no!*" she cried, as Robert had heard her cry it out once before, and then was gone through the window in a sheet of broken glass. Her voice rose in a single despairing shriek, and then was suddenly and mercifully silent.

Robert stood there, the salt of sweat suddenly in his eyes, the salt of blood on his lips. It was an infinity of distance to the window, but he finally got there, and had to thrust Kyserling aside to look down.

She lay crumpled on the sidewalk, and the thick black hair in loose disorder around her face shrouded her from the eyes of the curious.

The plainclothesman was gone, but Kyserling was still there watching Robert with sympathetic eyes.

"I thought he had killed her," Robert whispered. "I could swear he had killed her!"

"It was his body we found," said Kyserling. "She was the one who did it."

"But why didn't you tell me then!" Robert begged. "Why didn't you let me know!"

Kyserling looked at him wisely. "Yeah?" he said. "And then what? You tip her off so that she gets away; then we really got troubles."

There could be no answer to that. None at all.

"She just cracked up," Kyserling said reasonably. "Holed up here like she was, not knowing which way to turn, nobody she could trust . . . It was in the cards. You had nothing to do with it."

He went downstairs then, and Robert was alone in her room. He looked around it slowly, at all the things that were left of her, and then very deliberately picked up a chair, held it high over his head, and with all his strength smashed it against the wall. . . .

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Margery Sharp is famous for her utterly delightful stories of women — of all types from prigs and prudes to ladies of easy virtue. Her style is ingratiating, her plots are captivating, and the result is pure reading entertainment. But behind the light touch — the peacock-feather touch — is a wealth of shrewdness and perception. There is more in the smooth and glittering comedy than meets the eye . . .

Here is another short story by Margery Sharp which again explores the domain of the feminine. But this time the protagonists are a pair of spinster sisters. The Misses Pye might easily be called the British counterparts of that great American spinster of fiction, Mary Roberts Rinehart's wonderful Tish — except that Miss Pye and Miss Roberta Pye have their own way of doing things, even when they are as much at a loss as if they had suddenly found themselves marooned on Mars. Did we say "at a loss"? Well, one man's loss can be an embattled woman's gain . . .

WINNING SEQUENCE

by MARGERY SHARP

UP TO THE AGES OF 61 AND 63 THE Misses Pye had never told an untruth. Since their father had been a clergyman and their mother a deaconess, this was only right and natural; but it made their one lapse (which occurred on the first Saturday in September) all the harder to excuse. Even so, they did not actually *tell* the lie: the sin was a tacit one; and it is only fair to add that they were neither of them quite themselves at the time.

Miss Pye and Miss Roberta Pye lived on the top storey of 711 Portaferry Road, Paddington. The thoroughfare was not a prepossessing one, but they had an affection for it because it lay in the heart of their father's old parish; and it was also very cheap. No. 7 was not prepossessing either, until one reached the top floor; and then one entered a domain as exquisitely neat, as meticulously ordered, as a lady's work-box. It was probably the tidiest place in London, and it was dusted three times a day. What with dusting, cooking, visiting the sick, and doing embroidery for bazaars, the Misses Pye led full and happy lives: and they had in addition two never-failing sources of pleasurable pride.

These were a nephew in the Air Force, and a miniature of their great-great-grandmother; nor was it easy to say which gave them more satisfaction. The nephew Henry, starting as an aircraft apprentice at Halton,

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was now at Cranwell and well on the way to earning His Majesty's commission: the heirloom miniature, besides being an authentic proof of their breeding, was also a work of art. It was reputed to be by Cosway, and a Mr. Faraday, a friend of the Vicar's had once actually offered £50 for it. The two ladies naturally refused, and always talked of the offer as a gross breach of taste; but in secret they were extremely pleased by it. It was not everyone in Portaferry Road — or indeed, in Paddington — who had £50 lying idle on the mantel.

"We're a couple of sentimental old fools!" said Miss Pye every Saturday; for it was on Saturdays that the miniature was taken from its case and set upright against a little easel to grace the weekend. Saturday was also the day on which their nephew sometimes came to tea, so Miss Roberta always bought a cake as well as buns; and if he didn't arrive they ate the cake on Sunday (when it was a little stale, and went further), and thus had a treat for the weekend all the same. Neither Miss Pye nor Miss Roberta had ever heard of the Technique of Living, but they knew a good deal about it nevertheless.

On the first Saturday in September, however, the cake was bought in full confidence, for Henry was definitely expected; and it was therefore all the more upsetting when the 1 o'clock post brought a letter with an Air Force badge.

"It's to say he can't come!" cried Miss Roberta.

Miss Pye slit the envelope carefully (one of the parish Wolf Cubs collected crests) and drew out a short note. It consisted of no more than half a page, but she was so long reading it that her sister grew impatient.

"What does he say, dear? Why isn't he coming?"

"He is coming," answered Miss Pye slowly. "He's coming to supper."

"To supper! And we've only sardines! What time will he be here?"

"You'd better see it yourself," said Miss Pye, still in that odd slow voice. Miss Roberta glanced once at her sister's face, took the letter and read.

Henry was very sorry to trouble them, but could they lend him £50? And could they let him have it that night, as otherwise, he was afraid, it would mean leaving Cranwell. . . .

"Fifty pounds!" cried Miss Roberta, aghast. "Whatever can he want it for?"

"He doesn't say." Miss Pye moistened her lips. "He — he must be ashamed to."

There was a short, horrified silence. Then —

"Whatever it is," said Miss Roberta firmly, "we've got to get it for him. We must."

"Of course," said Miss Pye.

Their eyes flew to the mantelpiece. From her little easel the lady of the miniature smiled heartlessly back. Never before had she looked so charming, so debonair. No one could wonder that Mr. Faraday (man of wealth as he was) should be prepared to give so vast a sum for her.

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"You've still got the address, dear?" said Miss Roberta at last.

"The Gables, Southolt Green. But he talked about moving, because they'd built a racecourse there. He mayn't even be in England."

"We must go and see," said Miss Roberta sternly. "And if he *has* moved, we must go to — to a pawnbroker's. After all, it always was to be Henry's, wasn't it?"

In silence they made their preparations. To keep their strength up, they boiled and ate two eggs. Then they put on their best coats, and the hats bought only two years ago, and Miss Roberta wore her beaver necktie. They were not going to embarrass Mr. Faraday by any poverty-stricken looks. They would just explain that they were — well, tired of their miniature, and had decided to give him the first refusal. Miss Pye actually rehearsed the sentences as she put the ivory into its case and wrapped the case in a clean handkerchief. The whole packet took up no more room in her bag than the box of lozenges she carried for her cough.

"Suppose," said Miss Roberta suddenly, "he comes before we get back?"

"He has his key, dear."

"But he must be very worried. Mightn't we leave a message, just to say that it's all right?"

Miss Pye frowned.

"Whatever he's done, Roberta, we can't treat it as a — a peccadillo. Henry must be made to feel. Leave a message if you like, but only saying that we shall be back. And make it stern. He should be made to feel responsible."

So Miss Roberta, after a moment's thought, got out the newly bought cake and a sheet of paper, and on the paper wrote simply: *If we're late, dear, cut yourself a slice.*

It seemed to both of them that that was quite stern enough.

Southholt Green is a pleasant outer suburb most easily reached by train from Marylebone Station; and on that fine Saturday afternoon the two ladies were quite struck to observe how many other people were going there as well.

There was even a special booking-window, where they had to stand in a queue, and where half a dozen gentlemen took tickets before Miss Pye moved up to the grill.

"I want two third-class returns to Southholt Green ——"

"Race train?" snapped the clerk.

"Certainly not," corrected Miss Pye. "I want two third-class ——"

"If you go on the race train, you can get returns for one-and-three."

The sister looked at each other. It meant a saving of ninepence on each ticket.

"But we are not," explained Miss Pye, "*going* to the races. If it doesn't matter ——"

"If you don't make up your minds," observed a gentleman behind, "we'll none of us be going. . . ."

In some confusion Miss Pye put down her half-crown and hurried Miss Roberta off. They had no difficulty

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in finding the train, but spent so long looking for a Ladies Only compartment that the guard was at last forced to thrust them into a smoker. It already contained six gentlemen (four with cigars) and one young lady who, like her cigarless companions, smoked cigarette after cigarette; and in this wholly foreign atmosphere — their two persons squeezed into the space designed for one — their lungs filled with unaccustomed and offensive odors — the Misses Pye passed the next half-hour. They shut their eyes and endured. It is possible that they prayed. And on alighting at Southholt Green they felt and looked so remarkably shaky that the last touting taxi-man at once marked them down.

"Come on, ladies!" he cried encouragingly. "A bob all the way, and save you twenty minutes!"

Miss Pye looked at the vehicle with longing.

"Shall we, Roberta?"

"A shilling seems very reasonable," said Miss Roberta. "Only how does he know how far we want to go?"

"If he says a shilling, he must take a shilling; that's the law," said Miss Pye; and with her sister following, stepped recklessly into the cab.

It was at this point in their journey that they definitely took the wrong turning.

The taxi, as has been said, was the last on the station rank, and just as Miss Pye was about to give the address a portly gentleman sprang up as from the ground and placed his foot upon the step. At the same moment the door on the other side opened and a second gentleman, of equal girth, thrust himself unceremoniously in.

"Now, ladies," cried the first urgently, "you've got the last cab, we're in a hurry, what d'you say to letting us two share it, and getting a free ride yourselves?"

The ladies said nothing. They were too startled. It seemed as though everyone they met was bent on giving them loud peremptory advice; and as they had yielded in turn to the booking-clerk, to the guard, and to the taxi-man, so they now yielded to the gentlemen in a hurry. For before they could collect their wits their new mentors were established on the folding-seats, the driver had grinned and mounted, and the cab was in motion.

"It's like Alice in Wonderland," murmured Miss Roberta. "All the animals ordering one another about. . . ."

The gentleman opposite nudged his companion.

"Alice!" he repeated. "There's an Alice in the three thirty. How's that for a tip?" And he winked at Miss Roberta in so very vulgar a way that she at once closed her eyes. So did Miss Pye. But they had to open them almost immediately, for a moment later the journey — a remarkably short one, even for a shilling — had come to an end. It had come to an end, in fact, outside the Southholt Race Course.

"Oh, *dear!*" cried Miss Roberta despairingly.

"Didn't *you* give the address either?" wailed Miss Pye.

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For the moment, indeed, their courage was quite out. Their heads and backs ached, and though they were actually in Southholt Green, Mr. Faraday seemed as remote as ever. And in fact he was remote, for they had heard him mention with thankfulness that his house was at least nowhere in the vicinity of the abhorrent racecourse. It was far away over the Green, miles and miles away where no taxi on earth would ever take them for a shilling.

"Oh, *dear!*" said Miss Roberta again.

The gentleman paying the fare — for he was faithful to his word — looked round.

Of the wealthy Mr. Faraday he naturally knew nothing: all that presented itself to his eye was a couple of distressed-looking old ladies staring dejectedly at a notice-board. Neither Miss Pye nor Miss Roberta had even seen the thing, for their gaze was quite blank; but it so happened that the legend thereon might very well have accounted, to the casual observer, for their melancholy appearance. *Ladies, accompanied by Gentlemen,* said the board, *Half Price.*

With an impulse of pure benevolence the gentleman returned.

"Here," he said kindly, "you come in with us, and save half a dollar. How'll that do?"

Miss Pye drew herself up. But even as she did so — while the lightning flashed from her eye — an extraordinary thing happened.

"Thank you very much," said Miss Roberta. "I'm sure we're greatly obliged to you."

"Roberta, how could you?" demanded Miss Pye.

They were inside, their escorts had vanished: before them towered the backs of the stands, about them streamed hundreds of purposeful racegoers. Had they found themselves upon Mars, the Misses Pye could scarcely have been more at a loss.

"It was Providence," said Miss Roberta boldly. "Haven't we been *led* — all the way from St. Marylebone?"

"We have been hustled," corrected Miss Pye. "And if you think Providence approves of pony-racing ——"

"How do you know they're ponies?" asked Miss Roberta eagerly.

"I saw it on one of the notices. But ponies or horses, it's all the same thing."

"Oh, no," said Miss Roberta, "I'd much rather have them ponies. They're smaller, you know. And I do think, as we're here, we might just go and look at them."

Although two years younger, Miss Roberta had always taken the lead. She took it now, and with a hand hooked under her sister's elbow propelled her firmly between the stands to a sort of open paddock bounded by white railings; and here even Miss Pye breathed freely, for the aspect of the place was positively domestic. Family groups picnicked upon the grass, children ran shouting in the sun, elderly couples walked soberly up and down.

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An occasional beer-bottle caught Miss Roberta's eye, but thermos-flasks predominated. It was like the beach at Broadstairs, with the stands for boarding-houses and the row of bookies for the donkey-boys on the parade. Miss Roberta observed these last with interest, and found them a most respectable-looking set of men: if their voices were rather hoarse, that was doubtless due to their open-air life. . . .

"I wonder where the Tote is?" she mused aloud. "It's another way of betting money, you know, something like a slot-machine."

"You have too much to do with those Wolf Cubs," returned Miss Pye rather tartly.

She walked quickly towards the course, intending to avoid the crowd; but since the 3 o'clock race had just begun, her example was largely followed.

In a few moments the two ladies were hemmed in against the railings and staring, like their neighbors, up the green stretch; only unlike their neighbors they did not know what to expect. The sudden onrush of the ponies, the flash of the jockeys' coats, took them both unawares; the closeness and the speed made Miss Pye at least feel as though she had been narrowly missed by a thunderbolt.

As for Miss Roberta, as her first words showed, she had been absolutely struck.

"If we backed one and won £50," said Miss Roberta clearly, "we shouldn't have to sell the miniature."

Her sister jumped.

"*Backed* one, Roberta?"

"Put money on one. And then when it won, we should get a lot more."

Instead of at once changing the subject, Miss Pye rashly asked a question.

"But how," she inquired shrewdly, "can you tell which is going to win?"

"You just guess," explained Miss Roberta airily. "It's all luck — like that raffle we had at the Bazaar. I'm almost certain I could do it."

Miss Pye opened her mouth to deliver a peremptory rebuke; but either because the vicissitudes of the journey had really affected her brain, or possibly because the genius of the place seized and twisted her words, the rebuke was never uttered. All she said was:

"Don't put on more than half a crown, dear!"

The half-crown already extracted from her bag, Miss Roberta, followed by Miss Pye, edged back into the crowd before the stands. Her spirit was still high, but though she had talked so lightly of picking winners, she had very little notion how to set about it.

Her only preference in horseflesh was for the cream or dapple, and though there was a huge signboard giving the ponies' names, it made no mention of their color. She also knew, from a poem, that Arab steeds were fleet; but there was nothing about Arabs either. As though out of mere politeness, she turned and asked her sister's advice.

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"What sort of horses do *you* like, dear?"

"Percherons," answered Miss Pye promptly. "I always remember, that summer we stayed on the farm, what gentle faces they had."

Miss Roberta sighed. She was practically sure that Percherons did not race — and in any case, they were too big to be ponies. It was at this juncture that a voice from behind them — so apposite that it might have been the voice of Conscience itself — suddenly spoke.

"Want a winner, lady?" asked the voice affably.

They turned round and observed a dapper little gentleman in a check suit. Whether by accident or design, he was leaning against a sort of small signpost, and on the signpost it said *Sandy, the Lucky Scot.*

"Yes," said Miss Roberta quickly. "We want a winner very much."

At once, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, the gentleman whipped out an envelope and thrust it into her hand. Before Miss Roberta could open it, however, he followed up the gesture with a demand for sixpence.

"But why sixpence?" asked Miss Roberta.

The Lucky Scot looked at her with admiration.

"Because yer goin' to win two quid for two bob, lady, and I ain't a bloomin' philanthropist. You get two quid, I get a tanner: and if that ain't fair, I dunno what is."

"It does seem very reasonable," murmured Miss Pye. "I wonder he doesn't ask for more."

"Hush!" said Miss Roberta, hastily passing over the coin and leading her sister away. "He knows his own business best. I wonder what the horse's name is?"

To their slight embarrassment, it was Bachelor's Shirt; but after a good deal of advice and piloting from interested spectators — "They really seem very *helpful* here!" said Miss Pye — the ladies succeeded in buying a two-shilling ticket at the Tote. Then they followed the stream, and climbed up a stand, and stood in happy confidence waiting to see their horse win . . .

Of the eleven runners, Bachelor's Shirt was tenth.

Now the late Reverend Charles Pye, though as mild an old gentleman as ever held a living, had nevertheless been able to produce, as occasion required, a fine denunciatory style; and his blood now boiled in his daughters' veins.

Without a word, in perfect unison, Miss Pye and Miss Roberta nipped down from the stand and darted and dived through the crowd after the bobbing thistle-painted sign.

"You, man!" cried Miss Pye breathlessly.

The Lucky Scot turned and saw them. With unparalleled effrontery he even grinned.

"It didn't win!" accused Miss Roberta.

"It was last but one!" cried Miss Pye.

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The creature shrugged.

"All in the luck of the game, ladies. I'd have bet my bottom dollar —"

"Don't prevaricate," said Miss Roberta. "You sold it us as a winner, and it didn't win. It's downright dishonesty!"

As well he might, the Lucky Scot gazed at them in stupefaction. For if they had their code of ethics, so had he; and his profession of tipster was justified — even hallowed — by every unwritten law of the racecourse. His surprise and indignation, both boundless, found their only natural outlet.

"May I be damned," he began methodically, "may I be double-damned and double —"

"And don't use oaths," said Miss Pye severely. "You'll either pay what we should have won, or — or I'll fetch the police!"

The Scot glanced round. A small but appreciative crowd had already gathered, and there was no doubt whose side it was on. With ready chivalry it had plumped unanimously for the two old girls. "Go it, Ma!" cried the crowd heartily, and though the phrase offended her ears, Miss Pye was nevertheless emboldened by it. She looked the creature in the eye and positively defied him.

"Well, what *did* win?" he asked, weakening.

This was an awkward moment, for in their righteous haste neither lady had stopped to see. But the mob rushed to their aid.

"Rose Marie!" prompted the mob joyfully. "Twenty to one!"

"Or if you want the Tote dividend," added a gentleman more joyfully still, "it's fifty-eight-and-six."

"Then it's a bloomin' swindle!" shouted the enraged Scot. "It's a put-up job!"

"It is indeed!" cried Miss Roberta warmly. "We shall go to the police at once!"

"And if you can't control yourself," added Miss Pye, "we shall charge you with obscene language as well. . . ."

The tipster paused. He had a pretty good idea that on the first count at least no bobby would charge him; but there were several reasons why any contact with the police was in itself undesirable. They had nothing definite against him, but just at that moment he had no desire to thrust himself, as it were, on their notice. . . . With a sudden change of demeanor, he approached Miss Roberta's ear.

"See here, lady," he murmured, "s'pose I give you another tip instead — *real* dead cert — horse I'm going to put me own shirt on — how'll that do?"

The ladies whispered together.

"Yes," said Miss Roberta finally. "We're going to give you one more chance."

With a stub of pencil, on the back of an envelope, the tipster hastily scrawled a name; and beseeching them not to disclose it to anyone else, urged his two tormentors in the direction of the Tote. Then he took out his handkerchief, and thankfully applied it to his brow.

Contrary to his usual practice, the

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Lucky Scot left his signpost and mounted a stand to watch the next race; for he felt an unusually strong interest in the fate of his tip. The Misses Pye were standing directly before and a little way below him, so that if by unlucky chance they lost again he was fairly certain of being able to escape them. Had he known, as he did not, that they had backed the pony Chipmunk to the extent of a whole five shillings, he would probably have taken no risks, but left the course at once.

Chipmunk won.

"Thank 'eaven for that!" ejaculated the Scot piously; and once more mopping his brow slipped back to the old pitch.

He had not been there more than fifteen minutes, however, when his brief complacency was violently dispelled.

"You, man!" shrilled Miss Roberta.

"My Gawd!" cried the Scot in horror. "What's up now?"

"We can't get our money!" cried the ladies in chorus. "We went up to the window, and they wouldn't pay us! What shall we do now?"

Sandy the Scot groaned aloud. Though lacking the advantages of a classical education, he could by this time have given a pretty accurate description of the Furies.

"Here, let's see yer ticket," he said wearily.

Miss Pye displayed it.

"Yer on the Tote double, lady. Yer got to pick another 'orse fer the 5 o'clock, on the same ticket, see, 'n if that one wins too yer get a whole packet."

After he had explained it two or three times, the sisters withdrew and held a short conference. Then Miss Pye returned with her hand out.

"Here's your sixpence, and we'll have another winner, please."

"Not from me you won't," said the Scot firmly.

"What shall we do now?" whispered Miss Roberta.

They were already in the Tote queue, passing steadily along; and owing to their passage with the Lucky Scot, and to the urgent necessity of refreshing themselves with tea, they had not had time even to see what ponies were running.

"Have what the man in front has," counseled Miss Pye. "He's wearing opera-glasses."

"Seventeen," said the man in front.

"We'll have that, too," said Miss Roberta.

"Two," echoed the girl in the window; and that was how the Misses Pye picked the 5 o'clock winner.

They won £53; and their demeanor, as they collected the money, was so noticeably that of sleepwalkers that a benevolent policeman escorted them to the gate and put them in a taxi and told the driver to see them on the train. Miss Roberta's only conscious act was to give the taxi-man a pound. He put them into a first-class carriage, and since no one else got in they were able to take out the miniature and hold it alternately.

More exhausted than they had

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ever been in their lives, the two old ladies at last turned the corner and reached No. 7. In the top window a light showed.

"He's here!" said Miss Roberta, suddenly alert.

"Then we can have supper at once," said her sister thankfully.

"We shall have to speak to him first. Do pull yourself together, dear."

With straight backs and stern faces they toiled up the three flights of stairs. At the sitting-room door Miss Roberta even managed a frown. But as soon as they entered, as soon as their nephew turned to face them, all sternness melted away.

"Well, dear boy," said Miss Pye affectionately, "it's nice to see you"; and she took the wad of notes from her bag and slipped it into his hand.

"Is it — is it all here?"

"Yes dear, £50," said Miss Roberta. She spoke as calmly as she could, but the moment was a dreadful one. Henry looked so white, so racked, that the hearts of both old women yearned towards him: yet at the same time both in their hearts knew that he ought not to go unscathed. He should be — not punished, but made to remember.

"I've just been a plain damn' fool, Auntie."

"Don't swear, dear," said Miss Pye — but sympathetically.

"Just tell us how it happened," urged Miss Roberta, "and then you'll feel better."

The boy looked from one old face to the other.

"I — borrowed — some money out of the Sports Fund," he said at last. "I'd got into a mess. You see, I'd been backing the horses. . . ."

The two ladies sat very still.

"That's why I had to ask you. And when I got here this evening and saw what you'd done, I felt — I felt like the worst cad on earth."

The eyes of all three turned to the empty easel. In Miss Pye's bag the miniature weighed like lead. She rose and walked stiffly to the empty miniature-stand on the mantelpiece.

"My dear boy —"

"No," said Henry quickly, "leave the stand there. Leave it there whenever I come. I want it to remind me." He got up, and gave each of his aunts a kiss, and then involuntarily yawned. Emotion had so worn him out that five minutes later, when Miss Pye came in with the supper-tray, he was stretched on the sofa and fast asleep.

"Roberta!" whispered Miss Pye. "What are we to do?"

"We must go on deceiving him," said Miss Roberta clearly and firmly.

"But that's wicked!"

"Then we must *be* wicked, for Henry's sake. It will be a lesson to him all his life. Whereas if he knew how we *had* got the money —"

"Yes," agreed Miss Pye. Her eye rested a moment, almost wistfully, on the wad of notes. "You know, dear, I do see the temptation myself."

"So do I," said Miss Roberta. "And that's another reason for keeping the stand empty. To remind *us* as well. . . ."

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THE NUMBERS MAN

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

ANNE SAID: "I'M SO GLAD YOU CAN make it for dinner on Saturday. We're having Gregor Stolz for the weekend. I think you'll enjoy him."

I said something noncommittal about how I was sure I would, and certainly wouldn't think of missing one of Anne's curries. I looked in the mirror as I hung up the phone and my face was as blank as my words. There wasn't anything I could say — there wasn't any way I could tell Anne that having Gregor Stolz for the weekend meant murder.

I didn't know it officially. There wasn't any definite evidence I could point to, and my job is supposed to be cracking murders, not preventing them — though that's any man's job.

The oddest thing was that I not only didn't know who might be killed, I had no idea who'd do the killing. I only knew that Gregor Stolz meant death.

I noticed him first on the Harkness case. You may not remember that — it didn't get much of a play in the papers because Harkness cracked up and the psychiatrists took over and it never came to trial. Maybe you remember something about a man who was devilishly jealous of his sister and she got married secretly. Since he was old-fashioned enough to use a straight razor he was all equipped when he heard about the marriage.

Stolz came into it when we were trying to learn how Harkness had found out about the marriage. He was a friend of the family, I guess you call it. He admitted seeing Harkness earlier in the evening the night it all happened, and finally he admitted that he might have let something slip which gave the brother an idea of what was going on.

Something about him was familiar and it bothered me, but it wasn't until the Harkness case was all wrapped up that I placed him.

He'd been a witness in the Bantock business, and I'm pretty sure you'll remember that. It was splashed all over the papers. *BERKELEY BANKER RUNS AMOK.* Bantock came home plastered one night, took his World War I Service .45 and finished off his wife and his mother because they hated each other and both of them had threatened to leave and he couldn't live without either of them. He didn't either — live, I mean — not any longer than the time consumed by the trial and appeal.

And Gregor Stolz was the casual acquaintance whom Bantock had met in an Oakland bar that night. The defense had used him to emphasize how much Bantock had been drinking, to try and get a verdict of manslaughter instead of murder for him.

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The name was familiar from some place else, too. I remembered it when Captain Strudd cited the Martin case as an example of how a murderer gets what's coming to him. Young Martin at the University fed arsenic to his uncle only to learn that all Uncle's money went to a foundation to prove that Queen Elizabeth wrote Shakespeare. He was furious on discovering the terms of the will, and kept saying that a friend named Gregor Stolz had assured him of his first-hand knowledge that he was Uncle's heir. Martin was so mad about being fooled that he never even tried to play innocent. The trial was a formality, and Stolz never appeared as a witness.

Gregor Stolz had come to the Bay Region about six years ago. Since that time there had been seven murders and three suicides among the people he knew. For the most part, they didn't know each other — he seemed to have many circles of friends. He got around. So did Typhoid Mary, I guess.

At first it might look like what insurance people call a "prone." An accident prone is a guy who's always around when industrial accidents happen — he doesn't cause them, he doesn't do anything, but if he's in a plant the insurance company's going to lose money. What sailors call a Jonah — same thing. And Gregor Stolz was a murder prone, a carrier, if you like that comparison better.

But you look closer and you see that Gregor Stolz had let something slip to Harkness, he had talked to Bantock in the bar while the banker was drinking himself into a killer, he had given young Martin an odd idea of Uncle's will . . .

I was interested, to put it mildly. I did some checking on Gregor Stolz. His record was clean enough, on the surface. Born in Austria, came to America as a child, well-educated in the East, had a little money of his own and held a half-dozen insignificant jobs before he came into a good thing — a bequest almost as screwy as Uncle Martin's. He was assured a good income from a trust for life so long as he wrote pamphlets and gave lectures propagandizing for a duodecimal system of numerical notation, whatever that was. I did check on the death of the man who had left him his trust fund. At the age of 87, he had died peacefully in his sleep while Gregor was a thousand miles away.

My favorite bar in San Francisco is the Tosca. The drinks are good and cheap, the customers are mostly elderly Italian businessmen who are good Joes, the walls live up to the name with paintings of Puccini and scenes from the story, and the juke-box is quiet and stocks a lot of opera.

I was drinking a *caffé expresso*, a strong, bitter, steamed coffee, with brandy in it, and listening to the juke-box when I recognized the voice from the next stool talking with the barkeep.

I turned around to Gregor Stolz and said: "Hi! How's the witness?"

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His face smiled politely. He said: "You remember me, Lieutenant?"

"Harkness," I said, meaningfully.

He looked mournful and said: "A dreadful thing."

I couldn't contradict him. I just added: "Bantock."

"That poor man," he said sorrowfully.

I said: "Martin."

His eyes got smaller and he looked at me carefully. I went on. I went down the list of seven murders and threw in the three suicides for good measure. When I was through, he said: "You are a good policeman, Lieutenant. You notice things and you collect data. Will you have another drink?"

I said, "Thanks" and he ordered. Then he sighed, said: "Yes. I have encountered more than my share of human tragedy."

I said that was too bad, indeed it was, and just how did he explain it?

"I don't know, Lieutenant." His voice was soft and low. "Of course, as a mathematician and lecturer, I do have a theory . . ."

"Yes?"

The drinks came and he sipped his thoughtfully. "I think that every life has a possible murder in it. Or, rather let me express it a trifle more exactly — every domestic situation contains an inherent motive for murder. You are a married man, Lieutenant?"

"No."

He smiled and said: "How fortuhate. But marriage is not the only domestic situation. Everywhere there is murder, lurking, dormant. Most of these murders never happen — at least on the physical plane, which is perhaps the kindest way. But now and then something happens to stir the sleeping dogs. As for me, you may simply say that I bear a peculiar scent which arouses dogs from sleep."

The coffee tasted more bitter than usual. I said: "How unfortunate."

"Or if you prefer a chemical metaphor — you know how two chemicals may lie side by side inactive until a third is placed with them. The third takes no part in the resulting reaction, but it is essential to it."

"I've been to high school," I said. "A catalyst."

He nodded. "I assure you, Lieutenant, that I am almost afraid to meet new people. Too often have I seen this catalytic explosion. And yet my work — my writing and lecturing — makes contacts for me. I can hardly avoid it."

I finished my drink. "I'm weeping," I said. "It's just too pathetic about your fatal scent. But let me tell you something."

"Yes?" he asked warily.

"The next time I run into any reactions with you as catalyst, you're going to see how you like indefinite confinement as a material witness."

He smiled and his voice had a light lilt to it. "That is the best you can do, Lieutenant, isn't it?"

"You know what I ought to do."

"And you know there isn't a jury on earth that would pay attention. Especially since the peculiarities of

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legal purity would insist on the trial of one case at a time." He slid easily off the chair. "Goodbye, Lieutenant. We shall probably meet again some day."

I didn't see Gregor Stolz again until Anne's dinner party, when I saw him next to Anne helping her pour the sherry. He liked to help people.

Anne was dressed in something long and white that made her look fresh and floating, the way she had looked that night after her graduation when we decided rookie policemen shouldn't think about marriage. The men wore tuxes, which I'm not used to, but it was the least you could do to justify that enormous house and grounds up on Queen's Road.

I told Otis I was glad to see him and I meant it. He was the husband Anne deserved and I don't mean his money. He'd have done all right without that. He was a research chemist at Conch Oil and you know the kind of mind that means — sharp and precise and just a little nervous and erratic. His eyes grinned at me through the thick glasses, but there were some fine new wrinkles around them that hadn't been there last time, and I didn't think they came from grinning. He took me over and introduced me to a good-looking young Navy officer, his cousin, Lieutenant Commander Quentin Lyons.

Then Anne brought Gregor Stolz up to us — he was being helpful, carrying the tray of sherry glasses — and said: "I don't know if you've met the lieutenant? Mr. Stolz."

I said: "We've met."

"Under most distressing circumstances," Stolz added gravely.

Anne said simply, "I'm sorry" and didn't ask any questions. It showed a nice tact, but it might have been better if she'd pried a little.

The commander took over with a story he'd evidently started on earlier, about action he had seen in the South Pacific before being transferred to shore duty. I watched Anne while he talked and she reminded me of something but I couldn't place it. Something from a play, I thought.

When we went into the dining-room, my eyes popped the way they always do when I see one of Anne's curries. I said: "Whew! What a spread! And just what," I pointed to one of the twenty-odd small dishes, "is this?"

Anne laughed. "That's a new idea. Specialty of the house. It's rendered lamb fat — you know, like pork cracklings, only lamb."

Otis put his arm around her. "She looks like this and she can cook. What did I ever do to deserve her?"

"What indeed?" said Gregor Stolz.

It was a harmless remark, you'd think. Just a natural follow-up to Otis's line — banal echo-effect. But Otis's eyes met Stolz and something shot along his glance through his spectacles. Anne looked at the commander and for a second I would say her face showed terror.

Then she said: "Take whatever

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suits your taste and pile your plates very full — it's unrationed lamb." And it was just another dinner party, only better cooked than usual.

For a little while I didn't pay much attention to the talk. I let my mouth glow with a blend of flavors and textures that was like good music. When I paid attention again, Gregor Stolz was talking.

"The logic of it is so absolute," he said, "that it is doomed to failure. Some things are too cleverly true ever to be accepted."

Such as, I thought, the pattern of murder prones. But I went on listening.

"Place yourself," he said, "back at the point when arithmetic was made possible — the invention of the zero. And then ask yourself why the numeral one followed by the zero should mean ten."

"But what else could it mean?" Anne asked.

Gregor sighed with humorous patience, and Otis and the commander seemed to agree with him.

"My dear lady," Gregor went on, "take any number — let us say the succession of figures one-two-three-four. Now what does that mean, not in the decimal system, but in a system of any base?"

"I guess," Anne ventured, "it just means 1 times a 1000 and 2 times a 100 and —"

Her husband interrupted her. "My dearest sweet, what Mr. Stolz obviously means is that, whatever number is the base of your system, one-two-three-four means one times the third power of that number, two times the second power, three times the first power, and four times the zero power — which, of any number, is one."

"Of course," Stolz agreed. "That is all the meaning of the numerals themselves. It is simply a convention of our civilization that one-two-three-four means 1234. In the duodecimal system, it means one great gross, two gross, three twelves and four — in other words, what you would call 2056."

"And is that good?" I asked.

He laughed. "There is nothing miraculous in that special example, it is true. But the conveniences of the duodecimal system are great, so great that certain army supply depots have unofficially adopted it for such problems as figuring cubic content. And I use it myself for all my private calculations. Once one is trained to think in it, it is so much simpler."

"Why?" I asked.

He told me why at great length. And I found myself listening intently, partly because the subject was interesting, which I hadn't expected, and partly because I realized that Gregor Stolz was very much in earnest. He intensely believed in this duodecimal business. It was alive inside him.

Otis had his pencil out and was figuring on the tablecloth. Anne didn't notice him — not because she was absorbed in the numbers, but because she was talking to Commander Lyons. I wasn't happy when

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I saw her look at him, nor once when I saw Gregor Stolz steal a side glance at them both.

Otis looked up from his scrawls. "This is swell," he said. "It's a cinch once you twist your mind the right way. Bet I could work out a table of logs if I had time."

"It's been done," Stolz said, "and they're rather more helpful than —"

I looked at my watch. I said: "I'm sorry, Anne, but I've got to be on duty tonight, and first I'll have to change out of this monkey-suit."

They made all the polite noises and Otis and Anne went with me to get my coat.

When I came out of the house, Gregor Stolz was waiting for me. He didn't have anything to say. I think he just wanted to smile at my futility.

I said: "Not here. You get that, Stolz? These are my people. *Not here!*"

He smiled. " 'And what's he then that says I play the villian?' "

I spotted the quote. Berkeley cops surprise people that way. I said: "Iago? Don't overrate yourself."

"Overrate? When that poor fool was . . . catalyst to only four deaths?"

I said: "Three. He wasn't *catalyst* to Emilia."

"Such erudition, Lieutenant!"

"I like Shakespeare. He knew what makes people tick. And I'm beginning to catch your tickings, Stolz. You like numbers. You like things you can shove around and make jump through hoops. It feels good. So you try it on a living scale and that feels good, too. But not here."

I turned around and walked off. I wished we hadn't talked about *Othello*. Now I knew what Anne had reminded me of when she was listening to the commander.

She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.

I had the jumps at the desk that night. I kept going over it in my mind. It was a situation for a catalyst. Otis was overbrained and nervous, and his wife was looking dewy-eyed at a cousin that had come home from the South Pacific with all the glamor of heroism. There was something I'd heard once about Otis's grandfather . . .

I gnawed at myself so long over it that I almost wasn't surprised when the call came. The voice on the phone was incoherent. I didn't even know who was talking, or who was dead.

The surprise came after I got out there.

But now I was standing in Otis's study. The body was lying in the center of the room. There was a purple bruise on the jaw, and the face looked hurt and surprised. There was plenty of blood, and when will people learn not to leave sharp paper cutters on their desks? There was something by the corpse's hand, too, something that looked familiar and didn't belong there.

The doctor was saying: "Just

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missed the heart by the looks of things. Bled to death. Nasty, slow way of dying."

I said: "Good." The doctor gave me a funny look, but that was all right. I meant it. It was good that Gregor Stolz had had a slow nasty death.

It's hell to grill people you know, and the questioning didn't bring out very much.

The party had broken up after I left and for a while Otis had continued to talk numbers to Gregor Stolz here in the study — I didn't ask what Anne and the commander were doing at the time. Then Otis had gone down to the basement to look up some science fiction mags he had stored away that contained some stories about extraterrestrial nondecimal notation (it says in the transcript). Both Anne and the commander had been in the study (separately) to talk to Gregor but they had both left him alive (they said).

It was a family front and nobody was saying anything.

I picked up what was by the corpse's hand. "This is my notebook," I said.

Otis explained: "I found it by your place after dinner. Brought it in here, meaning to ring you up and forgot it."

"Stolz knew it was mine?"

"I think we talked about it."

Otis had found him when he came up from the basement. There weren't any science fiction mags in the room.

I talked to Anne last. When we finished her transcript, I asked Macready to go get her a drink. Alone, we sat looking at each other.

She said: "It isn't possible."

I said: "It happened."

"But he must have . . . done it himself?"

"The doc says no."

When she spoke again, she said a funny thing. She said: "And now of all times . . ."

I looked at her. She caught herself and shook her head. "No. Not even you."

"I'm not me," I said "I wear a badge."

"That isn't why. It's *you* I can't tell. Not the badge. Some time soon. Oh, soon. I want to, but it isn't fair . . ."

She didn't say anything more for a while. When Macready brought the drink I spilled a little on the shoulder of my suit. Willful destruction of evidence, they call it.

When she was gone Macready said: "And your own notebook is Exhibit A, huh, Loot?"

I looked at the notebook. There was blood on its pages — inside pages where it couldn't have dripped. And the blood made signs, intelligible marks — the way a finger might make, before it ran out of blood.

I said: "He knew this was my book. He left a message for me."

Macready said: "Jeez, Loot. What's it say?"

I worked on the marks. I said: "It's a big help. It says *Over Seven-Down*

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Ten. And under that it says *Fifteen-Ten.*"

Macready looked blank and then he snapped his fingers. "I got it, Loot. It's a crossword clue like in a story I read once. Over and down, see? You find the crossword and those words are gonna be the murderer's name."

I said: "You keep an eye on things here. I'll be back in an half hour or so."

Gregor Stolz had a small house up in Strawberry Canyon east of the campus and south of the hills. It was modern, I guess. Anyway, it had a lot of flat planes and seemed to grow right out of where it was, and I liked it.

I had the dead man's keys. I tried the study first with no luck, and then the bedroom. The bed was narrow even for a single and maybe that explained a little more about the way Gregor Stolz ticked before somebody stuck a papercutter in the works.

The bedroom had paneled walls. The part above the head of the bed was all fancy, with an inlaid diamond motif running around it.

I said: "Over Seven-Down Ten." I knelt on the bed and pressed my right hand on the seventh diamond in the top row and my left in the tenth at the side. Nothing happened. I felt around a little. My left hand moved down two diamonds.

The panel that opened was plumb in the middle of the wall, but I hadn't spotted so much as a crack. I looked in and I didn't see any rare East Indian snakes. I reached in and took out a leather-bound book. It was lying all by itself in front, but toward the back I could see a row like it.

I opened it and read a while. Then I reached in and read a little of one of the back volumes, just enough to be sure.

A man in my business ought to have a stronger stomach.

When I got back to the Queen's Road house Macready said: "All quiet. They're all three in the music room."

I heard voices and I went in without knocking. Anne was whiter than her dress and her mouth was open, not making a sound. Commander Quentin Lyons had his fists up defensive-like. Otis Jordan had his right in the air and he was staring at it as though he'd never seen it before and never wanted to see it again.

You'd think they had been living statues. I said: "O.K. Otis, I think it's time we had another talk."

He looked dazed, said: "Not . . . in there?"

I said: "Yeah. The study. Come on."

We left Anne with the commander. When Otis was seated in the study, trying to keep his eyes away from the stains, I said: "You socked him."

"I was going to. I was going to and then —"

"Not your cousin. Gregor Stolz. That bruise on his chin."

Otis's head nodded a weak yes.

I said: "Maybe you were honest

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before. Maybe you didn't remember. That'd be why you were so horrified when you started to slug the commander and all of a sudden remembered the other time."

Otis nodded again. Then he started to talk. He wasn't being articulate now. "He said things. Not Quentin — Gregor. Terrible things. That Anne . . . I couldn't stand it. Then the next thing I knew I was down in Grandpa's library. I didn't know why I was there. That's where I keep the science fiction, so I thought maybe. . . . But I was worried because I didn't remember and I came back upstairs and . . ."

"Found him."

"And I still don't know. Just now when Quentin . . . I remember the hitting but nothing more. How much more have I got to remember?"

It isn't a good thing to see an industrial chemist with tears in his eyes.

I said: "Anne and the commander both saw him alive afterwards."

He waved them aside. "They're my family."

I said: "You were in a mental jam, so you went to Grandpa's library. Grandpa was a little. . . . Well, wasn't he? I seem to remember —"

He twisted a smile. "Grandpa was nuts, if you want the truth. That's what makes me feel so. . . . He was a great scholar, you know — the money came from his brother. He spent all his life working on Elizabethan manuscript material. There's damned little of it and he spent a fortune and all his energy amassing stuff — this was before photostats. He was all ready to publish his book. It would have proved new things about collaborative methods in the Elizabethan drama. And then came the great Berkeley fire. That was just twenty years ago. It all went. Every scrap of it. Only he didn't think so. When that was Grandpa's library it had empty shelves. He used to take visitors around it and show them all his treasures and give them autographed copies of the book that was never published."

I said: "Hell!"

"You see we crack under strain, we Jordans, I've been overworking. I've felt like hell. And the things Gregor said. . . . They were poison, you know. I wouldn't say them even to you. I didn't believe them and still they made me take a sock at Quent just because he paid Anne a compliment."

I stood up. I said: "Come on back to the music room. I want to read you something. A little message from Gregor."

I tried not to look at Anne while I talked.

I said: "Gregor Stolz knew he was dying. He also knew that this was my notebook. He scrawled something in it for me. He didn't dare write his killer's name because if the killer saw it first he'd destroy it. Instead he left scrawls that looked meaningless. If the killer saw them he might worry, but he'd be a little hesitant about destroying the book I'd remember I left. It

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was up to me to figure them out.

"The 'crossword' directions sounded like the clue to a hiding place. I found a paneled wall at Gregor's and it was what I wanted. The other message — *Fifteen-Ten* — well, you'll see about that in a minute."

I opened the book in my lap and looked at it, gagging. I said. "It's hard to say in words of one syllable what Gregor was. I bet the psychiatrists have a name for it, but I wouldn't know it. I'd call it a remote-control murderer. Wherever Gregor was, murders happened. And it was always because he'd just happened to say the wrong word at the wrong time. This book from inside the panel, this is his — hell, his casebook. One of 'em. They're all written down here. Only he doesn't use names — he uses numbers.

"I think he told himself this was for secrecy in case the wrong eyes ever read it. But I think down underneath it was because that's all that names and the people ever were to him, numbers he could twist around the way he made three-four, one-two into two-o-five-six. The numbers are too easy to read for secrecy. For instance the last entry is: *Dinner tonight with One. One's curries are delicious, but I feel that I might add a few surprising ingredients.*

"And in an earlier book his references to the banker, Charles Bantock, are Three-Two. Just numerals for initials, you see — one for A equals Anne, Three-Two for C. B.

"Now I want to read you a little about his latest game," I said haltingly.

My throat was dry. They kept looking at me and I didn't dare stop. I read:

"*Fifteen-Ten will prove an unusually fascinating specimen. The situation is ideal. I was pleased enough with it simply in view of his emotional problems with the fair One, but imagine my entranced delight upon discovering yet another factor of even more pleasing complication.*

"*Fifteen-Ten is mad. He does not realize it, of course. It is doubtless hereditary, aggravated by occupational strain. I have picked up certain stories of his actions under stress which leave me no doubt, and I am sure his employers will soon take action. If they do not, a hint may interest them. . . . To play upon this madness, to utilize it to further the emotional tension, perhaps even to reveal it to One, thereby heightening her —*"

I broke off. I couldn't take any more of the reading Gregor Stolz kept by his lonely bed.

I shut the book and said: "He talked to Fifteen-Ten. He wanted to convince him, you see, that he was mad, in order to drive him to murder over — over One. He convinced him, all right."

Otis Jordan stood up. Macready made a move but I shushed him. Otis blinked through his lenses and said: "I guess madmen can still count. O's the fifteenth letter. J's the tenth. I'm ready whenever you are." Anne moved swiftly toward him. Her dress was white against him and her arms

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were white around his darker neck.

"It's not that easy," she said. "I don't care what Gregor Stolz wrote in his wicked little book. Otis isn't talking to you without a lawyer. And a psychiatrist if you wish."

Commander Quentin Lyons came close to the two of them. Gently, he tried to detach her arms. "Don't be foolish, Anne. Can't you see it's better this way? If you fight it, there'll only be a scandal."

Anne turned on him. Her eyes lightened. "Otis isn't crazy. Even if he is, he didn't kill anybody, and if he did, I'm not walking out on him. Do you mean you'd stand there and let this poor tired sick man talk himself into a murder confession? Why, you —"

I got up, too. This was all I was waiting for. I said: "Come along, Commander. Let Otis get his sleep. He needs it. And that isn't a bad idea about a psychiatrist, Anne."

Quentin Lyons said: "You mean you're not taking him?"

"Why should I when I've got you?"

The surprise held him breathless for a minute and I punched the words in hard. "Remember how Gregor said he was so sold on the duodecimal system he used it even in his private figuring? When I opened his panel, I had to reach down two diamonds from ten to twelve. One-five-one-o doesn't mean fifteen ten. It means —"

A spark came into Otis's dull eyes. "One-five equals one times twelve plus five. One-o equals one times twelve plus zero."

"Thanks, Otis, I figured that, but it took me time. In Gregor's duodecimal fifteen-ten means what in decimal is seventeen-twelve. In letters, Q. L. or Quentin —"

He was on his way to the door but somehow Macready was already there.

"He was probably beginning to crack when they transferred him to shore duty. And the field psychiatrist, not knowing about the family background — funny you don't always think of cousins having the same grandfather — didn't see it in the same light as Gregor did.

"Lots of flaws show up under the strain of war. With proper care and good sense, most of them can be fixed. But he had the bad luck to run into Gregor, who needed to push people around. . . ."

I stopped and looked at Otis. He was asleep. "I know a guy out at Conch Oil," I said. "I think I can arrange a sick leave for him."

Anne said: "You're sweet."

She moved on the couch so that Otis's sleeping head was on her white shoulder. I left them like that.

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STORY SAVED IS A STORY EARNED

The first really distinguished anthology of detective stories to be edited by an American was Vincent Starrett's FOURTEEN GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES, *published in 1928 by The Modern Library. This book was small and unpretentious in format, but as the publishers so justifiably claimed, it contained "an all-star list." The publishers made another claim which is well worth repeating even twenty-odd years after the fact:* "FOURTEEN GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES *is particularly recommended to readers who are inclined to sneer at detective fiction in general, for here they may learn how thrilling — and how well-written — these tales can be when fashioned by masters of the craft!" (The exclamation point is the publishers', and we can't help wondering if any publisher would think it necessary, or advisable, to make that same statement today.)*

Vincent Starrett's anthology remained constantly in print for twenty-one years — surely close to a world's record in the detective-anthology field. Then the publishers decided that the contents should be brought up to date. Many new sleuthian stars had risen and now deserved consideration even in so limited a survey as is represented by only fourteen stories. Since the original editor found himself unable to undertake the revision of contents, the publishers — with laudable acumen — selected Howard Haycraft for the task of editing a new edition.

Mr. Haycraft had no easy pickings — he was confronted with an embarrassment of riches. His first decision — and how difficult it must have been! — was to retain only six of the original fourteen stories — "all of them," Mr. Haycraft explained, "belonging to what may be called the historical period." The six survivors were, of course, absolute "musts" in any anthology, old or new. They were stories by such undisputed masters as Edgar Allan Poe, A. Conan Doyle, Jacques Futrelle, R. Austin Freeman, G. K. Chesterton and Melville Davisson Post — note the perfect balance of authors' nationality, three American and three British. To these six classics, Mr. Haycraft added stories by E. C. Bentley, Agatha Christie, H. C. Bailey, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ellery Queen, Rex Stout, Carter Dickson, and Cornell Woolrich — and so the pure detective story, as distinguished from tales of crime, mystery, and suspense, was brought up to date, as of 1949. And note again that Mr. Haycraft preserved the perfect balance of geographical origin, for while the first four of the eight

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new stories were English, the last four were the work of Americans.

Thus, in the process of modernization, FOURTEEN GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES *lost eight of its original selections. All eight of these stories were deserving of a better fate, but in justice to Mr. Haycraft and his multiple dilemmas, he really had no choice in the over-all picture. Eight stories simply had to go in order to make room for eight newer tales more calculated, to quote Mr. Haycraft, "to give the interested reader something of a panorama of detective fiction, its principal influences and mutations, through the years." Most of these eight older stories are now completely unavailable to present-day readers. We deeply regret their passing, especially the loss of one of them — Owen Johnson's excellent tale, "One Hundred in the Dark."*

This story first appeared in Mr. Johnson's book titled MURDER IN ANY DEGREE, *published in 1913. The book has long been out of print, and to the best of our knowledge "One Hundred in the Dark" is not included in any other anthology still current. So, to keep this fine old tale from sinking into oblivion, we bring it back alive, with all its fine suspense and puzzle, with all its fine conversation (almost a vanished art these days of terse prose and studied understatement), and with all the freshness that it has kept to these 40 long years of what Mr. Haycraft has called "later developments and styles."*

ONE HUNDRED IN THE DARK

by OWEN JOHNSON

THEY WERE DISCUSSING LANguidly, as such groups do, seeking from each topic a peg on which to hang a few epigrams that might be retold in the lip currency of the club — Steingall, the painter, florid of gesture and effete, foreign in type, with black-rimmed glasses and trailing ribbon of black silk that cut across his cropped beard and cavalry mustaches; De Gollyer, a critic, who preferred to be known as a man-about-town, short, feverish, incisive, who slew platitudes with one adjective and tagged a reputation with three; Rankin, the architect, always in a defensive explanatory attitude, who held his elbows on the table, his hands before his long sliding nose, and gestured with his fingers; Quinny, the illustrator, long and gaunt, with a predatory eloquence that charged irresistibly down on any subject, cut it off, surrounded it, and raked it with

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enfilading wit and satire; and Peters, whose methods of existence were a mystery, a young man of 50, who had done nothing and who knew everyone by his first name, the club postman, who carried the tittle-tattle, the *bon mots* and the news of the day, who drew up a petition a week and pursued the house committee with a daily grievance.

About the latticed porch, which ran around the sanded yard with its feeble fountain and futile evergreens, other groups were eying one another, or engaging in desultory conversation, oppressed with the heaviness of the night.

At the round table Quinny alone, absorbing energy as he devoured the conversation, having routed Steingall on the Germans and archeology and Rankin on the origins of the Lord's Prayer, had seized a chance remark of De Gollyer's to say:

"There are only half a dozen stories in the world. Like everything that's true it isn't true." He waved his long, gouty fingers in the direction of Steingall who, having been silenced, was regarding him with a look of sleepy indifference. "What is more to the point is the small number of human relations that are so simple and yet so fundamental that they can be eternally played upon, redressed, and reinterpreted in every language, in every age, and yet remain inexhaustible in the possibility of variations."

"By George, that is so," said Steingall, waking up. "Every art does go back to three or four notes. In composition it is the same thing. Nothing new — nothing new since a thousand years. By George, that is true! We invent nothing, nothing!"

"Take the eternal triangle," said Quinny hurriedly, not to surrender his advantage, while Rankin and De Gollyer in a bored way continued to gaze dreamily at a vagrant star or two. "Two men and a woman, or two women and a man. Obviously it should be classified as the first of the great original parent themes. Its variations extend into the thousands. By the way, Rankin, excellent opportunity, eh, for some of our modern, painstaking, unemployed jackasses to analyze and classify."

"Quite right," said Rankin without perceiving the satirical note. "Now there's De Maupassant's 'Fort comme la Mort' — quite the most interesting variation — shows the turn a genius can give. There the triangle is the man of middle age, the mother he has loved in his youth and the daughter he comes to love. It forms, you might say, the head of a whole subdivision of modern Continental literature."

"Quite wrong, Rankin, quite wrong," said Quinny, who would have stated the other side quite as imperiously. "What you cite is a variation of quite another theme, the Faust theme — old age longing for youth, the man who has loved longing for the love of his youth, which is youth itself. The triangle is the theme of jealousy, the most destructive and, therefore, the most dramatic of human passions. The Faust theme is the

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most fundamental and inevitable of all human experiences, the tragedy of life itself. Quite a different thing."

Rankin, who never agreed with Quinny unless Quinny maliciously took advantage of his prior announcement to agree with him, continued to combat this idea.

"You believe then," said De Gollyer after a certain moment had been consumed in hair-splitting, "that the origin of all dramatic themes is simply the expression of some human emotion. In other words, there can exist no more parent themes than there are human emotions."

"I thank you, sir, very well put," said Quinny with a generous wave of his hand. "Why is *The Three Musketeers* a basic theme? Simply the interpretation of comradeship, the emotion one man feels for another, vital because it is the one peculiarly masculine emotion. Look at Du Maurier and *Trilby*, Kipling in *Soldiers Three* — simply *The Three Musketeers*."

"The *Vie de Bohème?*" suggested Steingall.

"In the real *Vie de Bohème*, yes," said Quinny viciously. "Not in the concocted sentimentalities that we now have served up to us by athletic tenors and consumptive elephants!"

Rankin, who had been silently deliberating on what had been left behind, now said cunningly and with evident purpose:

"All the same, I don't agree with you men at all. I believe there are situations, original situations, that are independent of your human emotions, that exist just because they are situations, accidental and nothing else."

"As for instance?" said Quinny, preparing to attack.

"Well, I'll just cite an ordinary one that happens to come to my mind," said Rankin, who had carefully selected his test. "In a group of seven or eight, such as we are here, a theft takes place; one man is the thief — which one? I'd like to know what emotion that interprets, and yet it certainly is an original theme, at the bottom of a whole literature."

This challenge was like a bomb.

"Not the same thing."

"Detective stories, bah!"

"Oh, I say, Rankin, that's literary melodrama."

Rankin, satisfied, smiled and winked victoriously over to Tommers, who was listening from an adjacent table.

"Of course your suggestion is out of order, my dear man, to this extent," said Quinny, who never surrendered, "in that I am talking of fundamentals and you are citing details. Nevertheless, I could answer that the situation you give, as well as the whole school it belongs to, can be traced back to the commonest of human emotions — curiosity; and that the story of *Bluebeard* and *The Moonstone* are to all purposes identically the same."

At this Steingall, who had waited hopefully, gasped and made as though to leave the table.

"I shall take up your contention," said Quinny without pause for breath, "first, because you have

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opened up one of my pet topics and, second, because it gives me a chance to talk." He gave a sidelong glance at Steingall and winked at De Gollyer. "What is the peculiar fascination that the detective problem exercises over the human mind? You will say curiosity. Yes and no. Admit at once that the whole art of a detective story consists in the statement of the problem. Anyone can do it. I can do it. Steingall even can do it. The solution doesn't count. It is usually banal, it should be prohibited. What interests us is: can we guess it? Just as an able-minded man will sit down for hours and fiddle over the puzzle column in a Sunday balderdash. Same idea. There you have it, the problem — the detective story. Now why the fascination? I'll tell you. It appeals to our curiosity, yes — but deeper to a sort of intellectual vanity. Here are six matches, arrange them to make four squares; five men present, a theft takes place — who's the thief? Who will guess it first? Whose brain will show its superior cleverness — see? That's all — that's all there is to it."

"Out of all of which," said De Gollyer, "the interesting thing is that Rankin has supplied the reason why the supply of detective fiction is inexhaustible. It does all come down to the simplest terms. Seven possibilities, one answer. It is a formula, ludicrously simple, mechanical, and yet we will always pursue it to the end. The marvel is that writers should seek for any other formula when here is one so safe, that can never fail. By George, I could start up a factory on it."

"The reason is," said Rankin, "that the situation does constantly occur. It's a situation that any of us might get into any time. As a matter of fact, now, I personally know two such occasions when I was of the party; and devilish uncomfortable it was too."

"What happened?" said Steingall.

"Why, there is no story to it particularly. Once a mistake had been made and the other time the real thief was detected by accident a year later. In both cases only one or two of us knew what had happened."

De Gollyer had a similar incident to recall. Steingall, after reflection, related another that had happened to a friend.

"Of course, of course, my dear gentlemen," said Quinny impatiently, for he had been silent too long, "you are glorifying commonplaces. Every crime, I tell you, expresses itself in the terms of the picture puzzle that you feed to your six-year-old. It's only the variation that is interesting. Now quite the most remarkable turn of the complexities that can be developed is, of course, the well-known instance of the visitor at a club and the rare coin. Of course every one knows that? What?"

Rankin smiled in a bored, superior way, but the others protested their ignorance.

"Why, it's very well known," said Quinny lightly. "A distinguished visitor is brought into a club — dozen

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men, say, present, at dinner, long table. Conversation finally veers around to curiosities and relics. One of the members present then takes from his pocket what he announces as one of the rarest coins in existence — passes it around the table. Coin travels back and forth, everyone examining it, and the conversation goes to another topic, say the influence of the automobile on domestic infelicity, or some other such asininely intellectual club topic — you know? All at once the owner calls for his coin.

"The coin is nowhere to be found. Everyone looks at everyone else. First they suspect a joke. Then it becomes serious — the coin is immensely valuable. Who has taken it?

"The owner is a gentleman, does the gentlemanly idiotic thing of course — laughs, says he knows someone is playing a practical joke on him and that the coin will be returned tomorrow. The others refuse to leave the situation so. One man proposes that they all submit to a search. Everyone gives his assent until it comes to the stranger. He refuses, curtly, roughly, without giving any reason. Uncomfortable silence — the man is a guest. No one knows him particularly well — but still he is a guest. One member tries to make him understand that no offense is offered, that the suggestion was simply to clear the atmosphere, and all that sort of bally rot, you know.

" 'I refuse to allow my person to be searched,' says the stranger, very firm, very proud, you know, 'and I refuse to give my reason for my action.'

"Another silence. The men eye him and then glance at one another. What's to be done? Nothing. There is etiquette — that magnificent inflated balloon. The visitor evidently has the coin — but he is their guest and etiquette protects him. Nice situation, eh?

"The table is cleared. A waiter removes a dish of fruit and there under the ledge of the plate where it had been pushed — is the coin. Banal explanation, eh? Of course. Solutions always should be. At once everyone in profuse apologies! Whereupon the visitor rises and says:

" 'Now I can give you the reason for my refusal to be searched. *There are only two known specimens of the coin in existence, and the second happens to be here in my waistcoat pocket!*' "

"Of course," said Quinny with a shrug of his shoulders, "the story is well invented, but the turn to it is very nice — very nice, indeed."

"I did know the story," said Steingall, to be disagreeable; "the ending, though, is too obvious to be invented. The visitor should have had on him not another coin, but something absolutely different — something destructive, say, of a woman's reputation — and a great tragedy should have been threatened by the casual misplacing of the coin."

"I have heard the same story told in a dozen different ways," said Rankin.

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"It has happened a hundred times. It must be continually happening," said Steingall.

"I know one extraordinary instance," said Peters, who up to the present, secure in his climax, had waited with a professional smile until the big guns had been silenced. "In fact, the most extraordinary instance of this sort I have ever heard."

"Peters, you little rascal," said Quinny with a sidelong glance, "I perceive you have quietly been letting us dress the stage for you."

"It is not a story that will please everyone," said Peters, to whet their appetite.

"Why not?"

"Because you will want to know what no one can ever know."

"It has no conclusion then?"

"Yes and no. As far as it concerns a woman, quite the most remarkable woman I have ever met, the story is complete. As for the rest, it is what it is, because it is one example where literature can do nothing better than record."

"Do I know the woman?" asked De Gollyer, who flattered himself on passing through every class of society.

"Possibly, but no more than anyone else."

"An actress?"

"What she has been in the past I don't know — a promoter would better describe her. Undoubtedly she has been behind the scenes in many an untold intrigue of the business world. A very feminine woman, and yet, as you shall see, with an unusual instantaneous masculine power of decision."

"Peters," said Quinny, waving a warning finger, "you are destroying your story. Your preface will bring an anticlimax."

"You shall judge," said Peters, who waited until his audience was in strained attention before opening his story. "The names are, of course, disguises."

Mrs. Rita Kildair inhabited a charming bachelor-girl studio, very elegant, of the duplex pattern, in one of the buildings just off Central Park West. She knew pretty nearly everyone in that indescribable society in New York that is drawn from all levels; and that imposes but one condition for membership — to be amusing. She knew everyone and no one knew her. No one knew beyond the vaguest rumors her history or her means. No one had ever heard of a Mr. Kildair. There was always about her a certain defensive reserve the moment the limits of acquaintanceship had been reached. She had a certain amount of money, she knew a certain number of men in Wall Street affairs and her studio was furnished with taste and even distinction. She was of any age. She might have suffered everything or nothing at all. In this mingled society her invitations were eagerly sought, her dinners were spontaneous, and the discussions, though gay and usually daring, were invariably under the control of wit and good taste.

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On the Sunday night of this adventure she had, according to her invariable custom, sent away her butler and invited to an informal chafing-dish supper seven of her more congenial friends, all of whom, as much as could be said of anyone, were habitués of the studio.

At 7 o'clock, having finished dressing, she put in order her bedroom, which formed a sort of free passage between the studio and a small dining room to the kitchen beyond. Then, going into the studio, she lit a wax taper and was in the act of touching off the brass candlesticks that lighted the room when three knocks sounded on the door and a Mr. Flanders, a broker, compact, nervously alive, well groomed, entered with the informality of assured acquaintance.

"You are early," said Mrs. Kildair, in surprise.

"On the contrary, you are late," said the broker, glancing at his watch.

"Then be a good boy and help me with the candles," she said, giving him a smile and a quick pressure of her fingers.

He obeyed, asking nonchalantly:

"I say, dear lady, who's to be here?"

"The Enos Jacksons."

"I thought they were separated."

"Not yet."

"Very interesting! Only you, dear lady, would have thought of serving us a couple on the verge."

"It's interesting, isn't it?"

"Assuredly. Where did you know Jackson?"

"Through the Warings. Jackson's a rather doubtful person, isn't he?"

"Let's call him a very sharp lawyer," said Flanders defensively. "They tell me, though, he is on the wrong side of the market — in deep."

"And you?"

"Oh, I? I'm a bachelor," he said with a shrug of his shoulders, "and if I come a cropper it makes no difference."

"Is that possible?" she said, looking at him quickly.

"Probable even. And who else is coming?"

"Maude Lille — you know her?"

"I think not."

"You met her here — a journalist."

"Quite so, a strange career."

"Mr. Harris, a clubman, is coming, and the Stanley Cheevers."

"The Stanley Cheevers!" said Flanders with some suprise. "Are we going to gamble?"

"You believe in that scandal about bridge?"

"Certainly not," said Flanders, smiling. "You see I was present. The Cheevers play a good game, a well united game, and have an unusual system. By the way, it's Jackson who is very attentive to Mrs. Cheever, isn't it?"

"Quite right."

"What a charming party," said Flanders flippantly. "And where does Maude Lille come in?"

"Don't joke. She is in a desperate way," said Mrs. Kildair, with a little sadness in her eyes.

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"And Harris?"

"Oh, he is to make the salad and cream the chicken."

"Ah, I see the whole party. I, of course, am to add the element of respectability."

"Of what?"

She looked at him steadily until he turned away, dropping his glance.

"Don't be an ass with me, my dear Flanders."

"By George, if this were Europe I'd wager you were in the secret service, Mrs. Kildair."

"Thank you."

She smiled appreciatively and moved about the studio, giving the finishing touches. The Stanley Cheevers entered, a short fat man with a vacant fat face and a slow-moving eye, and his wife, voluble, nervous, overdressed and pretty. Mr. Harris came with Maude Lille, a woman straight, dark, with great masses of somber hair held in a little too loosely for neatness, with thick, quick lips and eyes that rolled away from the person who was talking to her. The Enos Jacksons were late and still agitated as they entered. His forehead had not quite banished the scowl, nor her eyes the scorn. He was of the type that never lost his temper, but caused others to lose theirs, immovable in his opinions, with a prowling walk, a studied antagonism in his manner, and an impudent look that fastened itself unerringly on the weakness in the person to whom he spoke. Mrs. Jackson, who seemed fastened to her husband by an invisible leash, had a hunted, resisting quality back of a certain desperate dash, which she assumed rather than felt in her attitude toward life. One looked at her curiously and wondered what such a nature would do in a crisis, with a lurking sense of a woman who carried with her her own impending tragedy.

As soon as the company had been completed and the incongruity of the selection had been perceived, a smile of malicious anticipation ran the rounds, which the hostess cut short by saying:

"Well, now that everyone is here, this is the order of the night: You can quarrel all you want, you can whisper all the gossip you can think of about one another, but everyone is to be amusing! Also everyone is to help with the dinner — nothing formal and nothing serious. We may all be bankrupt tomorrow, divorced or dead, but tonight we will be gay — that is the invariable rule of the house!"

Immediately a nervous laughter broke out and the company chattering began to scatter through the rooms.

Mrs. Kildair, stopping in her bedroom, donned a Watteaulike cooking apron, and slipping her rings from her fingers fixed the three on her pincushion with a hatpin.

"Your rings are beautiful, dear, beautiful," said the low voice of Maude Lille, who with Harris and Mrs. Cheever were in the room.

"There's only one that is very valuable," said Mrs. Kildair, touching with her thin fingers the ring that lay

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uppermost, two large diamonds, flanking a magnificent sapphire.

"It is beautiful — very beautiful," said the journalist, her eyes fastened to it with an uncontrollable fascination. She put out her fingers and let them rest carressingly on the sapphire, withdrawing them quickly as though the contact had burned them.

"It must be very valuable," she said, her breath catching a little. Mrs. Cheever, moving forward, suddenly looked at the ring.

"It cost 5,000 six years ago," said Mrs. Kildair, glancing down at it. "It has been my talisman ever since. For the moment, however, I am cook; Maude Lille, you are scullery maid; Harris is the chef, and we are under his orders. Mrs. Cheever, did you ever peel onions?"

"Good Heavens, no!" said Mrs. Cheever, recoiling.

"Well, there are no onions to peel," said Mrs. Kildair, laughing. "All you'll have to do is to help set the table. On to the kitchen!"

Under their hostess's gay guidance the seven guests began to circulate busily through the rooms, laying the table, grouping the chairs, opening bottles, and preparing the material for the chafing dishes. Mrs. Kildair in the kitchen ransacked the ice box, and with her own hands chopped the *fines herbes*, shredded the chicken, and measured the cream.

"Flanders, carry this in carefully," she said, her hands in a towel. "Cheever, stop watching your wife and put the salad bowl on the table. Everything ready, Harris? All right. Everyone sit down. I'll be right in."

She went into her bedroom, and divesting herself of her apron hung it in the closet. Then going to her dressing table she drew the hatpin from the pincushion and carelessly slipped the rings on her fingers. All at once she frowned and looked quickly at her hand. Only two rings were there, the third ring, the one with the sapphire and the two diamonds, was missing.

"Stupid," she said to herself, and returned to her dressing-table. All at once she stopped. She remembered quite clearly putting the pin through the three rings.

She made no attempt to search further, but remained without moving, her fingers drumming slowly on the table, her head to one side, her lip drawn in a little between her teeth, listening with a frown to the babble from the outer room. Who had taken the ring? Each of her guests had had a dozen opportunities in the course of the time she had been busy in the kitchen.

"Too much time before the mirror, dear lady," called out Flanders gaily, who from where he was seated could see her.

"It is not he," she said quickly. Then she reconsidered. "Why not? He is clever — who knows? Let me think."

To gain time she walked back slowly into the kitchen, her head bowed, her thumb between her teeth.

"Who has taken it?"

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She ran over the characters of her guests and their situations as she knew them. Strangely enough, at each her mind stopped upon some reason that might explain a sudden temptation.

"I shall find out nothing this way," she said to herself after a moment's deliberation; "that is not the important thing to me just now. The important thing is to get the ring back."

And slowly, deliberately, she began to walk back and forth, her clenched hand beating the deliberate rhythmic measure of her journey.

Five minutes later, as Harris, installed *en mâitre* over the chafing dish, was giving directions, spoon in the air, Mrs. Kildair came into the room like a lengthening shadow. Her entrance had been made with scarcely a perceptible sound, and yet each guest was aware of it at the same moment, with a little nervous start.

"Heavens, dear lady," exclaimed Flanders, "you come in on us like a Greek tragedy! What is it you have for us, a surprise?"

As he spoke she turned her swift glance on him, drawing her forehead together until the eyebrows ran in a straight line.

"I have something to say to you," she said in a sharp, business-like manner, watching the company with penetrating eagerness.

There was no mistaking the seriousness of her voice. Mr. Harris extinguished the oil lamp, covering the chafing dish clumsily with a discordant, disagreeable sound. Mrs. Cheever and Mrs. Enos Jackson swung about abruptly, Maude Lille rose a little from her seat, while the men imitated these movements of expectancy with a clumsy shuffling of the feet.

"Mr. Enos Jackson?"

"Yes, Mrs. Kildair."

"Kindly do as I ask you."

"Certainly."

She had spoken his name with a peremptory positiveness that was almost an accusation. He rose calmly, raising his eyebrows a little in surprise.

"Go to the door," she continued, shifting her glance from him to the others. "Are you there? Lock it. Bring me the key."

He executed the order without bungling, and returning stood before her, tendering the key.

"You've locked it?" she said, making the words an excuse to bury her glance in his.

"As you wished me to."

"Thanks."

She took from him the key and, shifting slightly, likewise locked the door into her bedroom through which she had come.

Then transferring the keys to her left hand, seemingly unaware of Jackson, who still awaited her further commands, her eyes studied a moment the possibilities of the apartment.

"Mr. Cheever?" she said in a low voice.

"Yes, Mrs. Kildair."

"Blow out all the candles except the candelabrum on the table."

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"Put out the lights, Mrs. Kildair?"

"At once."

Mr. Cheever, in rising, met the glance of his wife, and the look of questioning and wonder that passed did not escape the hostess.

"But my dear Mrs. Kildair," said Mrs. Jackson with a little nervous catch of her breath, "what is it? I'm getting terribly worked up! My nerves —"

"Miss Lille?" said the voice of command.

"Yes."

The journalist, calmer than the rest, had watched the proceedings without surprise, as though forewarned by professional instinct that something of importance was about to take place. Now she rose quietly with an almost stealthy motion.

"Put the candelabrum on this table — here," said Mrs. Kildair, indicating a large round table on which a few books were grouped. "No, wait. Mr. Jackson, first clear off the table. I want nothing on it."

"But, Mrs. Kildair —" began Mrs. Jackson's shrill voice again.

"That's it. Now put down the candelabrum."

In a moment, as Mr. Cheever proceeded methodically on his errand, the brilliant crossfire of lights dropped in the studio, only a few smoldering wicks winking on the walls, while the high room seemed to grow more distant as it came under the sole dominion of the three candles bracketed in silver at the head of the bare mahogany table.

"Now listen!" said Mrs. Kildair, and her voice had in it a cold note. "My sapphire ring has been stolen."

She said it suddenly, hurling the news among them and waiting ferret-like for some indications in the chorus that broke out.

"Stolen!"

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Kildair!"

"Stolen — by Jove!"

"You don't mean it!"

"What! Stolen here — tonight?"

"The ring has been taken within the last twenty minutes," continued Mrs. Kildair in the same determined, chiseled tone. "I am not going to mince words. The ring has been taken and the thief is among you."

For a moment nothing was heard but an indescribable gasp and a sudden turning and searching, then suddenly Cheever's deep bass broke out:

"Stolen! But, Mrs. Kildair, is it possible?"

"Exactly. There is not the slightest doubt," said Mrs. Kildair. "Three of you were in my bedroom when I placed my rings on the pincushion. Each of you has passed through there a dozen times since. My sapphire ring is gone, and one of you has taken it."

Mrs. Jackson gave a little scream, and reached heavily for a glass of water. Mrs. Cheever said something inarticulate in the outburst of masculine exclamation. Only Maude Lille's calm voice could be heard saying:

"Quite true. I was in the room when you took them off. The sapphire ring was on top."

"Now listen!" said Mrs. Kildair,

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her eyes on Maude Lille's eyes. "I am not going to mince words. I am not going to stand on ceremony. I'm going to have that ring back. Listen to me carefully. I'm going to have that ring back, and until I do, not a soul shall leave this room." She tapped on the table with her nervous knuckles. "Who has taken it I do not care to know. All I want is my ring. Now I'm going to make it possible for whoever took it to restore it without possibility of detection. The doors are locked and will stay locked. I am going to put out the lights, and I am going to count 100 slowly. You will be in absolute darkness; no one will know or see what is done. But if at the end of that time the ring is not here on this table, I shall telephone the police and have everyone in this room searched. Am I quite clear?"

Suddenly she cut short the nervous outbreak of suggestions and in the same firm voice continued:

"Everyone take his place about the table. That's it. That will do."

The women, with the exception of the inscrutable Maude Lille, gazed hysterically from face to face while the men, compressing their fingers, locking them or grasping their chins, looked straight ahead fixedly at their hostess.

Mrs. Kildair, having calmly assured herself that all were ranged as she wished, blew out two of the candles.

"I shall count 100, no more, no less," she said. "Either I get back that ring or everyone in this room is to be searched, remember."

Leaning over, she blew out the remaining candle and snuffed it.

"One, two, three, four, five —"

She began to count with the inexorable regularity of a clock's ticking.

In the room every sound was distinct, the rustle of a dress, the grinding of a shoe, the deep, slightly asthmatic breathing of a man.

"Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three —"

She continued to count, while in the methodic unvarying note of her voice there was a rasping reiteration that began to affect the company. A slight gasping breath, uncontrollable, almost on the verge of hysterics, was heard, and a man nervously clearing his throat.

"Forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven —"

Still nothing had happened. Mrs. Kildair did not vary her measure the slightest, only the sound became more metallic.

"Sixty-six, sixty-seven, sixty-eight, sixty-nine, seventy —"

Someone had sighed.

"Seventy-three, seventy-four, seventy-five, seventy-six, seventy-seven —"

All at once, clear, unmistakable, on the resounding plane of the table was heard a slight metallic note.

"The ring!"

It was Maude Lille's quick voice that had spoken. Mrs. Kildair continued to count.

"Eighty-nine, ninety, ninety-one —"

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The tension became unbearable. Two or three voices protested against the needless prolonging of the torture.

"Ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine and one hundred."

A match sputtered in Mrs. Kildair's hand and on the instant the company craned forward. In the center of the table was the sparkling sapphire and diamond ring. Candles were lit, flaring up like searchlights on the white accusing faces.

"Mr. Cheever, you may give it to me," said Mrs. Kildair. She held out her hand without trembling, a smile of triumph on her face, which had in it for a moment an expression of positive cruelty.

Immediately she changed, contemplating with amusement the horror of her guests, staring blindly from one to another, seeing the indefinable glance of interrogation that passed from Cheever to Mrs. Cheever, from Mrs. Jackson to her husband, and then without emotion she said:

"Now that that is over we can have a very gay little supper."

When Peters had pushed back his chair, satisfied as only a trained raconteur can be by the silence of a difficult audience, and had busied himself with a cigar, there was an instant outcry.

"I say, Peters, old boy, that is not all!"

"Absolutely."

"The story ends there?"

"That ends the story."

"But who took the ring?"

Peters extended his hands in an empty gesture.

"What! It was never found out?"

"Never."

"No clue?"

"None."

"I don't like the story," said De Gollyer.

"It's no story at all," said Steingall.

"Permit me," said Quinny in a didactic way; "it is a story, and it is complete. In fact, I consider it unique because it has none of the banalities of a solution and leaves the problem even more confused than at the start."

"I don't see —" began Rankin.

"Of course you don't my dear man," said Quinny crushingly. "You do not see that any solution would be commonplace, whereas no solution leaves an extraordinary intellectual problem."

"How so?"

"In the first place," said Quinny, preparing to annex the topic, "whether the situation actually happened or not, which is in itself a mere triviality, Peters has constructed it in a masterly way, the proof of which is that he has made *me* listen. Observe, each person present might have taken the ring — Flanders, a broker, just come a cropper; Maude Lille, a woman on the ragged side of life in desperate means, either Mr. and Mrs. Cheever, suspected of being cardsharps — very good touch that, Peters, when the husband and wife glanced involuntarily at each other at the end; Mr. Enos Jackson, a sharp lawyer, or his wife about to be di-

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vorced, even Harris, concerning whom, very cleverly, Peters has said nothing at all — to make him quite the most suspicious of all. There are, therefore, seven solutions, all possible and all logical. But beyond this is left a great intellectual problem."

"How so?"

"Was it a feminine or a masculine action to restore the ring when threatened with a search, knowing that Mrs. Kildair's clever expedient of throwing the room in the dark made detection impossible? Was it a woman who lacked the necessary courage to continue, or was it a man who repented his first impulse? Is a man or is a woman the greater natural criminal?"

"A woman took it, of course," said Rankin.

"On the contrary, it was a man," said Steingall, "for the second action was more difficult than the first."

"A man, certainly," said De Gollyer. "The restoration of the ring was a logical decision."

"You see," said Quinny triumphantly, "personally I incline to a woman for the reason that a weaker feminine nature is peculiarly susceptible to the domination of her own sex. There you are. We could meet and debate the subject year in and year out and never agree."

"I recognize most of the characters," said De Gollyer with a little confidential smile toward Peters. "Mrs. Kildair, of course, is all you say of her — an extraordinary woman. The story is quite characteristic of her. Flanders, I am not sure of, but I think I know him."

"Did it really happen?" asked Rankin, who always took the commonplace point of view.

"Exactly as I have told it," said Peters.

"The only one I don't recognize is Harris," said De Gollyer pensively.

"Your humble servant," said Peters, smiling.

The four looked up suddenly with a little start.

"What!" said Quinny, abruptly confused. "You — you were there? Is that a fact?"

"I was there."

The four continued to look at him without speaking, each absorbed in his own thoughts, with a sudden ill ease.

A club attendant with a telephone slip on a tray stopped by Peters's side. He excused himself and went along the porch, nodding from table to table.

"Curious chap," said De Gollyer musingly.

"Extraordinary."

The word was like a murmur in the group of four, who continued watching Peters's trim disappearing figure in silence, without looking at one another — with a certain ill ease.

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A WINNER IN EQMM'S PRIZE CONTEST

It is a pleasure to welcome Leslie Bigelow and his prize-winning story to the pages of EQMM. The author is in his early forties and a Special Lecturer in English at Arizona State College. He tells us, somewhat ruefully, that this is the eleventh American college and university where he has "menaced the minds of the young." (Read Mr. Bigelow's story, absorb his love for English literature, and judge for yourself how much of a "menace" he is in a classroom!) The author has had the good luck to travel extensively in Europe, and during the war he served with the Air Force in the Philippines. Out of all this background — especially out of his knowledge of London and its literary associations — has come a tale of a fabulous treasure and a pea-soup fog and a trio of sinister spivs and a "gross and greasy globe of a man" who proved to be the real menace — to the whole world . . .

GLIMPSES OF THE MOON

by LESLIE BIGELOW

YOU KNOW ME, OF COURSE: I AM Henry Winford Platt, the Des Moines accountant and amateur litterateur. You know what I found in London, and you know that I sold it to the British nation for three pounds, ten shillings — about $10.

Just 31 sheets of yellowed paper, eight inches by six and one-half, watermarked with a court jester's bauble. Yellowed sheets of paper. But I tell you that the cobra-guarded vaults of maharajahs glitter with nothing so precious, and the loot of Attila, buried with him on the Danube shore, is not half so bewitching.

Do you say, "Well, I'll take Attila's plunder?" Then you don't know that I declined seven cabled offers, including one of $975,000 (about one-tenth of the true value of those sheets) from a well-known collector of manuscripts in Dallas, Texas. . . .

On a Saturday night in London I like to prowl along the Strand to Piccadilly Circus and Leicester Square; then across the Thames to Southwark, halting now and then among the crowd for a game of darts and a beer or a small scotch. Ah, those tavern names! *The Trip to Jerusalem. The Goat and Compasses* (out of an old error for "God encompasseth"). *The Black Boy and Stomach-Ache. The Elephant and Castle.* And all the rest. (Although I remember an even finer one in Paris — *Le Pourquoi Pas*,

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which is, so to say, *The Why Not?*)

Oh, I wander foolishly enough, and as I wander I pretend. Perhaps that some glorious woman will run out of a sinister purlieu. She is afraid, of course, insanely afraid, but I . . . Or in a flurry of shots, smash-and-grab thieves loot a jeweler's window. The bobbies are baffled, but with great cunning I . . . Anyhow, at closing time I always end in Southwark at *The Magpie and Tailor*, where a spidery little fellow, the neighborhood darts champion, has learned to expect a gulp of Irish whiskey from the Des Moines Yank. *The Magpie and Tailor* stands near the site of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre; the darts champion is straight from old England, cranky and tough.

This evening, behind the oval bar with its gleaming brass beer engines, a few bottles of lager floated in a washtub with a pill of dirty ice — iced beer, no less. True, once I used to chuckle at the Englishman who scorns refrigeration, central heating, and the rest because he hasn't got them — pure fox-and-the-grapes. But after The Battle of Britain (and much else) I no longer chuckle at the British.

As I decanted the lager, a frayed little fellow beside me turned to say, with a Dundee burr, "An American, a Yank, eh, lad?"

Catching my eye, the barkeep shook his head. I gathered that the little man was a kind of tavern mascot: I was to step gingerly. So I excused myself, went to the toilet, and when I came out the barkeep was waiting beside the door. "Don't mind 'im, sir," he said. "A sawbones. Or used to be. Don't work at it now. Won't let 'im, I daresay." He wagged a sympathetic head. "Drink, you know."

I handed the barkeep a ten-shilling note. "Let him drink that up. On the house, of course."

And fortified with brandy, the little seedy man talked with me for a long while: extraordinary talk, keen and cracked. Through many worlds he reeled, now a philosopher, now a fool, now a bloomin' duke. The brave talk rang out, but the little man was lost and sad, like a small boy in a strange woods. Gradually the story came out — in a phrase here and a phrase there: wife died, then drink, then a bungled diagnosis; then the children go to an aunt in Glasgow, and then . . .

When the old cry of "Time, gentlemen! Time, please!" began to nudge us out, the little doctor had drunk up the ten shillings; and as I left, the barkeep said, "Thanks, mate. He was a damned fine man once."

Outside in the street the doctor tugged at my sleeve and said, "Just a moment, guv'nor, will ye, please?" A counterfeit arrogance masked a dreadful shrinking inside him, and I listened, there in a beginning fog from the south.

"Look, guv'nor." He extended a heavy parcel, wrapped in an old London *Observer*. That *Observer* lies before me on my desk now. It is the issue of Sunday, March 3, 1940. The first page is crammed with ads.

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On page 9 one reads: *HITLER'S MOOD DEFIANT, "Germans Must Lead in Europe."*

When he folded back the *Observer*, I saw four heavy books and perhaps a dozen flat sheets. "Sorry," I said. "You know I'm an American. Going back soon. Hate to carry anything unnecessary."

Then he convinced me altogether. For this solid objection of mine silenced him, as it would not have silenced a fraud. The fraud would slide glibly over the objection with a rehearsed patter. But this little doctor was still a man, aware of other men's problems. He began to fold the newspaper back into place.

I said, "All right, man. May I see what you've got there?"

The books were German. The sheets were good prints of old London: Covent Garden, the Haymarket, and so on. There was a print of the Fortune tavern on the bankside, where perhaps Shakespeare wandered after a first performance of, say, *Hamlet*. "Been in the family since God knows when," the little man said.

"How much?"

"Guv'nor, I've got to have three quid ten. I've just got to have it."

"Why three pound ten?"

"Guv'nor, I've just got to, I tell ye."

I drew out four banknotes, and I really offered them to Dunkirk and Churchill and the Battle of Britain. With jerky haste he tucked them away and touched his cap. "Guv'nor —" But I had let him scrape and bow enough. "Well worth it," I said. "The prints alone are worth it." And they were.

"Where d'ye live, guv'nor?"

I told him.

"I'll be to see ye tomorrow afternoon. Ye're a good Yank, guv'nor." I almost told him that I was sure to be out; but then, he was a good Scot, too.

He hurried through the fog into a fish-and-chips shop. A few moments later, with a huge greasy newspaper package under his arm, he vanished down the steps of an areaway below a *To Let* sign. Just before he went in, he glared at the sign, counted his money, and with enormous satisfaction tore it down.

I travel for Banning & Platt, installing accountancy systems for European firms. Because I had worked through Sunday, Monday morning the job was done for Harrington & Sons, Ltd., Leather and Findings. "Young" Mr. Harrington, 60-odd, offered me a farewell Madeira in the quiet cellar hideaway near the Bank of England where we always lunched. Before its fireplace, the roast beef of old England once suffused its noble steam; and Harrington and I drank to the speedy return to England of that steam. Then, in a thickening fog, I sauntered up High Holborn toward Cartwright Gardens.

As always, the footways were dog-fouled. The bomb cavities were inde-

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cent, like gaps left in a sound mouth by the villainous extraction of sound teeth. The fog rolled thicker, a regular pea-souper, yellow and dirty, while I paused a moment before a tailor's on Holborn, inspecting a gray tweed, matching it to my pudgy figure in the window. Just why I can't say, but an English suit or a French one looks no more American than an American girl in Paris or Milan can ever look French or Italian.

In London I always stay at the Monmouth Arms, a tiny residential hotel in the crescent of Cartwright Gardens, near the roaring King's Cross station. The slavey, Alice, always grins at me with splintered teeth. I've known Alice for eighteen years now. From year to year her hair fluctuates violently in color. Some years she looks a good deal older than others, depending on the brutality of her current sweetheart. But the teeth are constant: socialized dentistry has done nothing for them yet.

At the head of the first flight of stairs my room always awaits me dingily. Next door, the retired captain of artillery drunkenly squabbles with his French wife over shillings for the gas meter. But just now there were only three other guests: Ellen, the Yorkshire curate's daughter, a typist; Terry the Irishman, office man for a dog-racing syndicate; and Tim the Cockney, lorry-driver for a wholesale fruiterer.

Or at least, so they said and so I believed, until one day Macclin, the fine Shakespearean scholar, visited me. Versed in London types, he said of them, "*Pfui!* Spivvies. Black-marketeers. Watch out for them."

Prompted by Macclin, I examined them more carefully, and was interested to note that each of them looked precisely like what each claimed to be. Ellen was the true curate's daughter; Terry the true Irish betting man; Tim the true London truckman, down to the tweed cap and twisted teeth. But all this in a world where people seldom look like what they are: where the professor often looks like a cardsharp, the preacher like a ward politician, and the madam like the President Emeritus of the Ladies Saturday Morning Tennyson, Lobster-Fishing, and Uptown Marching Society.

Obviously, they had looked shrewdly at themselves. They had determined just what they really looked like. And then they had declared that they were what they seemed to be — anything but mere spivvies, butterflies, black market insects, carrion prowling the mews with illicit petrol and nylons. Spivvies — but clever and dangerous ones.

As I entered the hotel, they were whispering together in the parlor. I walked past them and then in my room unwrapped the books I had bought from the little doctor. One was a standard text on Latin grammar. I seemed to see the ten-year-olds, standing at attention in the Prussian classroom, announcing that all Gaul was divided into three parts.

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Another was the first volume of a three-volume set of Hegel. It seemed rather unfair that Hegel, who argued everything in three steps, should be stripped of his middle premise and his conclusion. Another was a battered *Almanach de Gotha*.

The fourth was an edition of Shakespeare's tragedies. Now, the Germans are devoted to Shakespeare. Disposed to class him as a German, they regard his Stratford birth as merely another vile trick of perfidious Albion, probably accomplished with forged records. Here were *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, and *Coriolanus*. For some reason, no *Macbeth*.

The Shakespeare had been rebound in black pebbled leather, with heavy manila pockets pasted inside the covers for notes. The front pocket was plump with a square yellowed packet, folded in two. And I thought I saw a grim old German Dry-as-Dust methodically tucking away the sheets and I seemed to hear him say, "Abominable handwriting, *nicht wahr?* English handwriting." And then the sheets, from God knows where, were forgotten in the vital current of Prussian life, the goose-stepping parades, the gruff barkings, the heraldic eagles.

God bless you, Herr Dry-as-Dust, God bless you!

I tell you I was staggered near to fainting. I'll wager I stood stock-still for 50 seconds. Then I ransacked a set of postcards I'd bought at the Guildhall Museum the week before. *Yes!* There was the signature, on a property deed. I compared it with the yellowed sheets. *Yes!*

Oh, God bless you, Dry-as-Dust!

For here — here in my hand — were 31 yellowed sheets, carrying *Hamlet* in manuscript — in manuscript, mind you! — through that steamy scene in which the prince crucifies his mother. The handwriting? It was precisely like the signature and like the handwriting, too, of that odd single scene in the play *Sir Thomas More* which Shakespeare may have written. The paper? Right; an irregular laid paper with fibrous edges, where larger sheets had been torn against a rule. The ink? Right; and oak-gall brown.

Perhaps you think I babbled like a child? But you must understand that no manuscript of Shakespeare had existed until then. Oh, manuscripts of poets laureate, manuscripts of driveling poetasters — by the trunkful, by the atticful, by the libraryful; but no manuscript of the lord of them all. God bless you, Dry-as-Dust!

While the fog coiled dirtily against the window, one of the three or four divining minds in all man's history moved and felt and spoke in those yellowed sheets:

It is April, say, 1599. The Globe Theatre fills with the afternoon loiterers: apprentices from the City, carpenters, woolmongers, lords from the Strand palaces. Outside, applewomen smirk, "What d'ye lack? What d'ye lack? It has a price!" Four young heirs down from Oxford enter excited. They've just

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"shot" London Bridge. Old London Bridge halts the tidal flow of the Thames with massive pillars. At ebb tide, the water banks; and at some peril they've ridden between the massive arches, beneath the merchants' massive houses, on the little waterfall.

Overhead floats the Globe flag, Hercules shouldering the world. Then a flourish of trumpets. In broad daylight, beneath the clouds of April, the play begins. "Who's there? . . . Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself."

I turned to the place in the manuscript.

And then, from below or backstage, that voice! It is Shakespeare, William Shakespeare himself; William Shakespeare the indifferent actor; William Shakespeare playing Hamlet's murdered father.

And Hamlet, played by Burbage, who painted Shakespeare's portrait, demands of this specter-Shakespeare, why, clad in complete steel, he "revisits thus the glimpses of the moon." And now even the four young heirs are hushed. "To be or not to be. . . ."

And I seemed to hear Burbage speak in the accent of Shakespeare's day:

Toh bay awr naut toh bay. . .

God bless you, Dry-as-Dust! May you rest at peace forever in your Prussian heaven, with regiments to bark at, with helpless children to terrify and helpless France to invade . . .

But of course I must check; and Alford Macclin was my man. Macclin was a fellow of a college at — call it whichever you like, Camford or Oxbridge. No doubt he fulfilled his duties there, whatever those duties may have been, with competence, but to the consternation or at least surprise of his scholars and colleagues. Consternation, for the great scholar Macclin was a gross and greasy globe of a man, dirty in habit, bald, and with a jagged half-moon scar beside the left side of his mouth.

Just *when* he was busy with his duties I could never determine, for I always found him in London (after I had found him the first time on the advice of a cataloguer at the British Museum) and always in the back room of a fusty cabman's pub off Southampton Row, *The Begging Wife*. There he lolled in his greasy tweeds at the greasy table with its red-and-white checked oilcloth, sipping cherry brandy and teasing the cockney waitresses as they scampered about with ale or stout or veal pie and brussels sprouts. "Glimpses of the moon," he used to say of this tawdry scene.

Now, I have seen several men perform their intellectual tasks, for a time at least, while drinking a very great deal indeed: two quarts a day of hard liquor appears to be an outside limit, except for fabled heroes. But I have never seen anybody else do it on cherry brandy — yet Macclin was in absolutely the first rank of world Shakespeareans. And it is worth adding that although the waitresses disliked him, they could not altogether despise him. His love of

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Shakespeare flickered in his ruined grossness like a candle still alight at some altar slimed with neglect.

Macclin glared at me. "Honorificabilitudinitatibus!" he declaimed.

Sighing, I was obliged by our custom to answer, "*Hi ludi F. Baconis nati tuiti orbi.*"

This mumbo-jumbo is scarcely worth explaining. The "word" Macclin used is a nonsense word put in the mouth of a pedantic ass in *Love's Labour's Lost.* Although it is shaped like a Latin word, it means nothing whatever. But some ingenious rogue, dreaming that Sir Francis Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays for him, transposed the letters into my Latin phrase, which means, roughly, "These plays, F. Bacon's offspring, are preserved for the world."

Pure claptrap, clever but absurd, and today I had no time for our bookish folderol. "Macclin, I want your opinion of something."

"Ah?" He sipped his brandy. "In these days of the death of reason does an American approach an Englishman for an opinion? Preposterous!" Again he sipped. "And how fare your fine friends at the hotel?"

Of course he meant Ellen, Terry, and Tim. "Still there," I said. Then I handed him the precious packet.

Languidly he extended his right hand, raising his brandy glass, smeared and sticky, with his left. He made a complex ritual of these two actions: the languid right hand declared the triviality of my request; the left hand saluted important transactions.

I said, "Wipe your fingers first."

"Ah?"

"Wipe your fingers." He drew out a dirty handkerchief. I handed him a clean one, and he said "Ah?" again — but he used it.

Then he opened the packet. I saw the little eyes, first indifferent, then amused, then intent. He held a sheet to the light of the filthy window to check the watermark. Then he half glanced up with a quick, sly speculation, returning to the sheets which, for all his bored air, began to tremble in excited fingers. The half-moon scar crimsoned.

"Well?"

Macclin said flatly, "There *is* no manuscript of Shakespeare."

"Don't you mean, there *was* no manuscript of Shakespeare?"

Something hostile, even dangerous, seemed to enter his mood. He strove to destroy my belief with, "A clumsy fraud. Wrong paper. Wrong ink. Wrong watermark. Wrong everything." But those potato fingers trembled enough to rustle the sheets.

"Ah?" I said.

His whole manner had become elaborate. With an ornate indifference he asked, "What are you going to do with this — transparent forgery?"

"Shouldn't it be in the British Museum?"

Macclin poured more brandy, then forced himself to sip very slowly with little animal grunts of pleasure; he hummed idly, his eyes blankly scanning the dirty room. "Fraudulent, but amusing. You know" —

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meditatively — "you know there are collectors of frauds — such frauds, for example, as those of Thomas James Wise; and I think" — wearily — "I think I might be able to find you 50 or even £100 pounds for this. For a fraud, it's rather well done, you know."

But he had told me all I needed to know. Macclin knew as much as anybody, and Macclin was convinced. Rising, I grasped the packet firmly. "Thank you, Macclin."

He coughed; a little spray of brandy misted over the oilcloth. "This man — a fool you know, but quite devoted to his little hobby — this man *might* go as high as 200."

"Thank you, Macclin. I'd better call the Museum, don't you think?"

Now the whole shabby hulk heaved slowly up, like a sea elephant emerging from the depths. He was half menacing, half beseeching. "Great God, Platt! You're not going to throw this away for nothing? Why, we could. . . . Why, great God, the thing's worth thousands, hundreds of thousands. With my backing . . ."

He touched my arm; for an instant I was sure he would throw himself upon his knees. And I can never forget the face of Macclin as he wavered there, squalid but with the oblique power of decay, his face as covetous as a devil's in pursuit of the soul of a saint. With those hundreds of thousands, out of the greasy chrysalis of Macclin could flutter something clean, something fresh and new. . . . But now all this, this new-birth of Macclin, was vanishing through the door in the pocket of an impudent Yank. The man was equally pitiful and repulsive; like all men, he was equally dreadful and touching.

"Great God, Platt!"

"Thank you very much," I said.

Then I made phone calls which impressed me all over again with how hard it is to give away something valuable. Had I whispered stealthily, "I've got a manuscript, a *Shakespeare* manuscript, to sell. Smuggled in from Timbuktu by a Javanese stowaway on an Argentine freighter," there might have been derision. But there would scarcely have been the mingled caution and bureaucratic indignation — yes, indignation! — which were audible when I asked, "Who should I see about the donation of an extremely important item of Shakespeareana?"

Finally, after an hour's quibbling, I made an appointment with a Dr. Merganser of the British Museum. Even he was secretly afraid, somehow, but he covered his feelings with brisk efficiency and consented to receive me in a week's time. *In a week's time!* I determined to call in the reporters and have a week's carnival with bureaucracy.

As I walked to Cartwright Gardens through the fog, I stole constant but almost furtive glances at this sheet or that of the manuscript. Why furtive? I cannot say for sure, but I felt somehow as guilty as a little boy who has discovered the secret hiding place of

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the Christmas presents. I was simply not up to this treasure; I had no business carrying it, but like the little boy I could not forbear looking.

At the Monmouth Arms I was still glancing at a leaf after I had closed the door. Then I stammered, "Oh, you!"

When nobody spoke, I demanded, "Just what in the devil are *you* doing here?"

Macclin did not answer. Ellen and Tim and Terry stood there negligently; and behind them, sweating but determined, hulked Alford Macclin, like some bloated pirate instructing active youngsters in veteran methods of foray.

They were all obviously in league. I seemed almost to hear the covenant: ("Only a damned Yank, after all. The . . . er . . . the property is actually mine, in any case. Merely a somewhat irregular recovery, you know." "How much, fattie?" "Ah, perhaps . . . ah, perhaps five pounds apiece." "Make it ten, fattie." Hesitation. "Very well, then, ten." Knowing looks. "Quite valuable, eh, fattie? But *yours*, all yours.")

"Macclin," I said, "You're a damned fool."

It was curious to watch him. For a moment his intelligence assented — as it had to assent — to the statement. But then greed overrode all. Greed exploded through his whole nature like a galvanic dose of strychnine. "Get it," he whispered to the spivs.

The whisper was curious, too. It was almost as though he felt that a low voice lowered the offense. There was no sound now anywhere. The hotel was empty — no captain's wife wailing at the meter. Cartwright Gardens is a crescent with little traffic, and the old mansions, converted into these little hotels, were built like fortresses lest any worldly noise disturb the old Victorian teaparties.

"Get it!" Macclin whispered again.

Terry and Tim? The American tough is alarming, but in a way you know him. Although he may do savage things, at least you know the kind of thing that he may do. But the alien tough alarms you with the prospect of an alien violence. You do not know him, and you do not know what he may do. The American tough carries a pistol, but the English tough may carry a potato filigreed with razor blades.

"Get what?" I asked.

Macclin whispered, "That envelope. That manila envelope. There under his arm."

With a calm as false as Macclin's when he first saw the manuscript, I asked, "All this over a few sheets of scratch paper?"

But Macclin's excitement — and mine — had their contagion. Ellen and Terry and Tim began to sniff like terriers.

Unblinking as a snake's, the pale eyes of Ellen stared at me through her horn-rimmed glasses. With a curate primness and classroom air of culture intolerable in view of what she was, she asked quietly, "Chaucer?"

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I said nothing; she watched my face.

"Milton?"

I said nothing.

"Shakespeare?"

Some ungovernable twitch of my face informed her. Without changing her expression she became deadly. It was clear at once who dominated the shabby trio.

Again Ellen asked, "Shakespeare?" She made little flickering finger motions to Terry and Tim. And now Macclin was aghast. Even through his greed it penetrated to him that if the packet departed from me, it would certainly never arrive at him.

Of course I was frightened: this pudgy Des Moines accountant is no warrior at all. But overmastering mere fright, I saw a series of images, and they appalled me. These precious sheets in the manicured hands of some porcine British swindler, or some filthy gangster grown "respectable" in America. Or worse still, in the hands of trash and depravity.

Or perhaps it was a disdain of their position that supported me. After all, there had been no time for them to rehearse strategy. Someone might — someone must — come in soon; the hotel being vacant had been pure luck. And unless they killed me (would they risk that? — the English crook does not relish murder) unless they killed me, they had only the slenderest of chances, for the enormity of the theft would alert all England.

"Macclin," I said, "let's stop this nonsense, shall we?"

I believe that Macclin whispered, "All right." But Ellen smiled, a vain, witch's smile, motioning again to Tim and Terry. And then they stared behind me. . . . I felt a draft as though someone had opened the door to peep in, unsure of welcome. I was afraid to turn around. But the draft increased, wisps of fog rolled in, and with a slam the door flung full open against its stop. Then someone brushed my shoulder to stand beside me, saying, "Ho, Yank, my lad. The devil's own time finding ye."

The little doctor's voice faded away as he watched their faces. "Ho, Yank. All right, lad?"

"Careful."

"Ho! Careful is it? And with my friends from *The Three Crowns* awaiting outside."

Now they were troubled. *Did* his friends wait outside? The door was open: I should have rushed through it into the crescent, shouting. The stupid game should have been over.

But instead I asked foolishly, "*Is* anybody with you?"

Ruefully, "Me, lad? Friends? *Me?*"

For an instant, they were puzzled that I did not run. Then I could see a certainty that the doctor was alone pass over their faces. The doctor saw it too, and like a sprinter from the mark he made a dead set at Macclin, shouldering aside Tim and Terry.

"Sassenachs!" he shouted, and charged full against Macclin. Within that demented lard, muscles stirred, a gross hairy fist slammed against the side of the little doctor's head, smash-

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ing him against the rail of the staircase, and without a word the doctor fell face down, bleeding.

Macclin sucked a knuckle with a vacant, imbecile air. But Terry and Tim knew what they were doing.

"Dead," Terry said. His tone was quite abstract, as though he offered a laboratory report on a stricken animal.

"Or dying," Tim added coolly.

Then with almost invisible gestures, all three divorced themselves from the scene. Except for Ellen's, their faces were blank. But in bad moments I still see her standing there, pale-eyed behind her glasses. Across her face flashed a dreadful, murderous look — the grimace of a monstrously vain person, thwarted.

As I hurried to the doctor, the slavey, Alice, and the artillery captain and his wife lurched in with a wild hurrah of laughter. A ragged regiment indeed: Alice with her peroxided hair; the captain barking half-remembered orders; his wife jigging in a kind of sailor's hornpipe. Macclin never had a chance; and now it was all over. I could almost hear the furies clamoring in Macclin's brain: ruin; ruin; oh, red, red ruin. He looked at something far away, perhaps in distance, perhaps in time. What he saw, who could tell. But Macclin began to cry.

The little doctor opened his eyes and smiled. "Good luck to ye, Yank." And then he turned on his side to murmur, "I thank ye, God. I thank ye, God."

Oh, he may have been pleased to think that he had helped avert some unimaginable calamity. But I do not think so. I think he said, "I thank ye, God! I thank ye, God!" only because he knew that very soon now he would be dead.

As you now know — and the pedantic squabble made a retching contrast with the little doctor's fineness — as you know, Dr. Ferret declared that if a genuine manuscript had existed to be found, *he* would have found it. With his world-famous squint, Dr. Squint squinted; and Dr. Flimflam announced that the manuscript was a noble specimen of Bacon's handwriting. "All the distinguishing peculiarities are present," he told the attentive press. With inexorable logic he added, "If Bacon did not write it, nobody wrote it."

But I tell you that Shakespeare, William Shakespeare himself, stands up in those yellowed sheets, watermarked with the jester's bauble. He stands up, and he looks mellowly about, and he does most solidly revisit the glimpses of the moon. Authenticated and enshrined, the manuscript is now precisely where it ought to be — in the British Museum.

And the little doctor? Let me say with very special pleasure that I talked with a personage, an Exalted Personage. He was exquisite in manner: the tradition of Palmerston still lingers in high places. He thanked me again for my gift. He thanked me on behalf of the British nation, and

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I asked him, "Just one more thing."

His countenance did not change. *He* changed. I had been his excellent friend. Now I was merely his acquaintance. "Yes," he said. "A grateful nation, you may be sure. Still, one must be aware that your title is really quite tenuous. In case of dispute . . ."

With great elegance of manner I interrupted. "Nothing of the sort, sir. Oh, I was tempted. An American collector offered me almost a million, sir. And to the shame of your nation I had several secret British offers, too." Then I smiled. "I do not know, sir, and I do not wish to know, in what degree I have been influenced by fear that I could not permanently make off with the plunder."

As he smiled with me, I spoke of the little doctor; I had loved that gallant little man. "There's nothing can be done for him now," I said. "He is happy at last, I think. And yet, you know, I should like to see his name replaced on the medical roster."

"But his license was revoked?"

"And could be reinstated. Why not, sir? Where's the harm?"

"Ah, perhaps."

Then I did what the British declare that Americans do so well. I became righteous. I looked at him and through him at the British nation — as a duke might contemplate a welshing bookmaker.

He recognized the look and said, "One cannot be sure."

"But one can make sure?"

The exalted personage nodded.

"And his children?"

Again the personage nodded.

So perhaps the little doctor is at peace. His children's annuity comes from a truly British source: from a fund set up originally by Victoria's ministers to pension the widow of an Egyptian khedive who was bribed to hinder de Lesseps during the construction of the Suez Canal — and then, after Disraeli's purchase, *un*bribed to guard it.

Framed, the check for £3 ten shillings hangs over my Des Moines desk, quite correctly made out to Henry Winford Platt, the Des Moines accountant and amateur Shakespeare scholar. Oh, I am human enough, and therefore I am sometimes rueful. Sometimes the check fades away to be replaced by a shimmering check for $1,000,000 from some clandestine collector. But then I see the wretch, some darkened miser, gloating in his vault alone; and I grunt, "Faugh!"

Four times the Museum has begged me to cash that check. By gad, sir, can't even a Yank accountant be businesslike?

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INSPECTOR APPLEBY'S FIRST CASE

by MICHAEL INNES

"MY FIRST CASE?" INSPECTOR APPLEBY looked at his friends with the appearance of considerable surprise. "Do you know that nobody has ever asked me about that before? It's always the *latest* case that people are curious about."

The Vicar nodded. "News is more popular than history nowadays. It is only one symptom, I fear, of a deplorable —"

"Precisely, my dear Vicar." The Doctor's interruption was hasty. "How right you are. But let Appleby tell us his story. For I can see that there is a story. That manner of squinting into the bowl of his pipe is an infallible sign."

"My first case was quite a small one." Appleby finished squinting and began to puff. "I'd say about eighteen inches by ten. And certainly not more than three inches deep."

The Vicar looked bewildered. "This case was about a *case?*"

"It was about this rather small case. But then, of course, I was rather small too."

"To be exact in the matter, I was just fourteen — a solemn child with somewhat precocious intellectual tastes and no notion of becoming a policeman. At thirteen I had been a geologist, littering my room with sizable chunks of any hills I could get within hammer's reach of. At fifteen I was going to be a tremendous authority on comparative religion. But at fourteen my line was the fine arts. I spent my holidays in the National Gallery or the Tate, and I particularly liked the delightful business of paying a shilling, and sixpence extra for a catalogue, in order to look at the picture-dealers' shows in the West End.

"This case that I'm telling you about contained a dozen exquisite pieces of jade, and it was exhibited on a table in the inner room of the Ferrarese Gallery, off Bond Street. The place may be familiar to you. It certainly hasn't changed from that day to this, and it had then, as it has now, the habit of running two exhibitions concurrently. I had gone there to look at Impressionists in the larger rooms. The jade and other Chinese stuff in the room at the back wasn't part of my program for the occasion. I'm sure I *had* a program, laid out with admirable neatness, and that it indicated the study of Oriental Art as not due to begin until six weeks later."

The Doctor chuckled. "You may have been a little prig, Appleby. But you were a systematic one."

"No doubt. But I remembered that I had paid my shilling for *both* shows, and so I did make a quick survey of the Chinese things. The Impressionists had drawn a big crowd, but there was only a handful of people here at

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the back. I took a look round and then stuck my head into the room lying farther back still. It's not much larger than a good-sized cupboard, where they sometimes exhibit a single picture or work of statuary under rather *recherché* lighting. I don't remember what was actually on show there on this occasion, but I do remember the man with the red beard. Indeed, he is one of the three or four human beings whom I am quite certain I shall never forget.

"He was alone in the little room — an elderly man of shabby but cultivated appearance, muffled in a shapeless old ulster, and carrying under his arm a sheaf of papers and an enormous folio volume in an ancient leather binding. I looked at the folio with great respect — I had a large reverence for learning as well as the arts, and here clearly was a scholar in the grand tradition. I also looked at the red beard. There was something fascinating about it. Indeed, I must positively have stared, because I remember suddenly recollecting my manners and turning in some confusion to whatever artistic object was on view. When I looked at the scholar again a rather startling thing was happening. He was picking up his beard from the floor and hastily replacing it on a perfectly clean-shaven face."

The Inspector paused and the Vicar rubbed his hands. "Capital!" he said. "Here was swift observation, my dear Appleby, leading to your first triumph. Proceed."

"I was a bit staggered, and no doubt rather scared. It was with a feeling that there was safety in numbers that I retreated to the crowd milling round the Impressionists. But my mind was moving swiftly. At least, that was my own instant conviction in the matter, since I had read time and again how Sexton Blake's mind invariably worked swiftly on similar occasions.

"Conceivably, my swift thinking might have led in the fullness of time to the formulating of some line of positive action. As it was, events again took the initiative. I became aware that somebody was shouting, and a second later an attendant or commissionaire rushed out of the inner room. I caught the single word 'jade.' And at that my tender intellectual faculties really *did* move with tolerable speed. I saw the whole thing in a flash — or *almost* the whole thing. I knew the villain — for are not villains invariably disguised? And I knew just what he had done — for would not the showcase with those priceless little jades fit exactly into that assuredly bogus folio volume? It was a tremendous moment. And yet more tremendous was the moment immediately succeeding it. For there was the red-bearded man not six paces in front of me — and making unobtrusively for the street."

Appleby again halted in his narrative — this time to tap out his pipe.

"I gave a great yell. At least, I thought I did — and was a good deal surprised to hear nothing. It was like the sort of dream in which you try to

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cry out and no sound comes. But a second attempt was more successful. Indeed, it commanded the instant attention of every soul in the place. 'That's him!' I yelled — and I don't doubt that I was horridly conscious of the bad grammer even amid the very triumph and relief of achieving articulate speech. As I yelled I pointed. And as I pointed I sprang. For there had come to me — with utter inevitability, you will admit — the one unquestionably correct course of action at such a juncture. Attendants were already closing on the red-bearded man. But I got there first, grabbed that beard with both hands, and pulled. The next instant I became aware that he was yelling too. He was yelling with pain. There were tears in his eyes. A single tuft of hair did actually come away. But his beard was as genuine as the childish down on my own lip. And the folio that ought to have been no more than a box concealing that little show case lay open on the floor — a perfectly ordinary and authentic book."

"But this is terrible!" The Vicar was dismayed. "It was a shocking situation for any sensitive boy. What happened next?"

Appleby smiled. "I certainly experienced all the standard things — like wishing that the floor would open and swallow me up. The establishment, clearly, would have liked to wring my little neck. Only for the first few moments they were too much occupied with apologizing to my outraged victim, asking him if he wanted a doctor, offering to call him a taxi, begging to be allowed to rebind the folio, and a great deal more besides. That allowed me to get my second wind."

"Second wind!" The Doctor was startled. "You didn't sail in again, I hope?"

"Certainly. It was the only thing to do. I had come quite clear-headed at last, and I knew that this fellow must absolutely be held onto like grim death. I fought so hard, and did such a lot of damage, that the police when they arrived felt they must send for an Inspector. He sorted the thing out, and a check-up on the man with the real beard eventually led to the tracking down of the man with the bogus one. That was what, in the end, I had seen: that if there were *two* men like that, they must be in a plot together. They had worked out a clever technique of distraction, particularly suitable for playing off against a boy. As soon as Mr. Bogus Beard had contrived to let me see that his *was* a disguise, he simply thrust that disguise away and did the stealing. Whereupon his confederate, Mr. Real Beard, planted himself before me in turn, and elicited the response that diverted everybody's attention while Mr. Bogus Beard, still beardless, got away with the booty. If I hadn't stuck it out, Mr. Real Beard would have got away in his turn, loaded with handsome apologies for my irresponsible imagination and outrageous conduct." Inspector Appleby chuckled. "And what a bewildered little ass I'd have felt!"

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

BEAT NOT THE BONES *by CHARLOTTE JAY* (HARPER, $2.50)	"Extremely well-handled mystery . . . This might easily scare you out of your wits." (LGO)	". . . true mystery and Charlotte Jay does a magnificent job throughout . . ." (FC)
THEIR NEAREST AND DEAREST *by BERNICE CAREY* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	". . . miraculous standard of middle-class realism that no other mystery writer can quite equal. B plus." (LGO)	". . . exciting solution . . . a fine job of handling a wide group of characters . . ." (FC)
DEATH OF AN INTRUDER *by NEDRA TYRE* (KNOPF, $2.50)	"An amazing story sparked with suspense by a talented young author." (FP)	". . . superbly handled suspense. Absolutely a top flight chiller." (FC)
THE SHROUD OFF HER BACK *by STEPHEN RANSOME* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	". . . basic plot is pretty good and the background colorful. C plus." (LGO)	". . . one can't complain of a lack of action. Not bad." (AdV)
DEATH PLAYS THE GRAMOPHONE *by MARJORIE STAFFORD* (MACMILLAN, $2.50)	"Smoothly written, quite interesting, not a hair out of place. Agreeable." (LGO)	"Marjorie Stafford can, in the absolute, write and this . . . is completely absorbing." (FC)
THE CREEPERS *by JOHN CREASEY* (HARPER, $2.50)	". . . though fast paced, seems contrived and therefore dull." (LGO)	"High adventure and excellent suspense, with a psychological approach." (FC)
THIS YEAR'S DEATH *by JOHN GODEY* (CRIME CLUB, $2.50)	". . . brisk if not wholly credible finish. Keeps you reading, at least." (LGO)	"This is a real chiller in every sense . . ." (FC)
NARROW GAUGE TO MURDER *by CAROLYN THOMAS* (LIPPINCOTT, $2.50)	". . . heroine . . . is literally a detecting fool . . . writing is spirited and readable . . ." (LGO)	"Lively writing, excellent suspense." (FC)

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

". . . curious and skillfully told tale . . . a new writer of rather astonishing capacity . . ." (JS)	". . . an extraordinarily valuable addition to the ranks of mystery writers . . . beautifully deft plot . . ." (AB)	
". . . as an observation of murder in suburbia it's lively with interest." (JS)	". . . highlighted by . . . unusual warmth. Excellent." (AdV)	
"Plot contrived and characters made to fit same; jolt ending. Not up to her first." (SC)	". . . situation . . . powerful . . . But the murder plot is simple and a trifle too glibly neat." (AB)	
". . . rather feverish endeavor . . . proceedings full of suspense." (JS)	"Both story and characters are well below the last Ransome . . ." (AB)	
"Designed to be in the tradition, it's a sedulous and somewhat petrified example." (JS)	"Miss Stafford may easily write a first-rate book as soon as she finds a story to tell." (AB)	
"Furiously exciting, fantastically melodramatic turmoil of cops and robbers." (DD)	"Police pleasantly human, but culprits . . . approach fantastic. Amiably preposterous." (SC)	
"It's all about as entertaining as it is tense and preposterous." (JS)	"Nice job, but violent double switcheroo offers problem. Mature piece." (SC)	
"All wrapped up in far too many words . . . Corny." (AdV)	"Plot overloaded . . . but background is well-handled and things move. (SC)	

KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*

FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*

SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*

DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune*

LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*

FP: *Fay Profilet in the Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*

JS: *James Sandoe in the New York Herald Tribune*

AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

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WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE

Author's age: late thirties. Education: graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University. Occupation: newspaperman — Sunday editor of "The Youngstown Vindicator" . . . But such bare facts do not give a true insight into how and why Browning Norton wrote a story like "The Panther." To know the how and why, we have to dig deeper . . .

The author was born in a small village in a rural county and lived there until he was sixteen years old. (Ah, now we're getting at it!) For his prize-winning story, Mr. Norton went back to that small village, back in his memory to the people he knew as a child and teen-ager. (It's clear now why "The Panther" is such an American *story!) People in those days — people who lived in communities of 500 or less — were different somehow; at least, that is what Mr. Norton thinks in mature retrospect. They were, as he expresses it, "individualists with a capital I," and the older Mr. Norton gets, the more clearly he seems to remember them.*

So, there is the how and why . . . Mr. Norton's story is rooted in memories of his own boyhood. It is a country story — of farmers and dogs and henhouses; of country men talking, at the grist mill and in the general store — talking of crops and feed prices and the terror lurking in the neighborhood after dark; of country women attending their weekly Sewing Circle and also talking about the terror hiding in the hills; and of the silence in country woods, "punctured by the cry of tree toad and cricket, the owl's call, soft vague plops, swishes and whirs, that told of a world of night creatures abroad . . ."

THE PANTHER

by BROWNING NORTON

IT BEGAN WHEN THE FARMERS around the north district of Conroy County complained about something breaking into their henhouses. Hardly anyone padlocked henhouses those days, chickens being kind of a side issue in that end of the county, and henhouse doors were mostly flimsy affairs held by a peg. That served to keep out small predators — skunks and weasels — and anyhow the farm dogs usually took care of them. But an animal big enough to put some weight against a henhouse

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door could undoubtedly force it open.

That's why the Conroy farmers figured whatever this was, it was big; that and some other things. It happened at the Coulter place, and at Parsons', and at Dunlaps' on the river road, and several other places at the foot of the hills. One or two fat hens missing, blood and feathers on the floor, and the thing so quiet and slick that the other chickens weren't even disturbed. Another funny thing: all the farms had dogs, big shaggy cow dogs people called shepherds, and not afraid of anything. But only one of those dogs set up a fuss, and that was Dunlaps' Caesar.

Caesar cut loose with a savage volley of barking about 3 A.M. and aroused old man Dunlap out of a sound sleep.

"Next thing I knowed," old man Dunlap said later, "Caesar was yipping and kiyiing like a scared pup, an' I heard him tear around the house and I knowed he was going under the porch. Hadn't done that since he was weaned. Well, I got up and lit a lantern and grabbed my shotgun and went out back. One of my hens was a-laying on the ground all chewed up bloody. Pretty soon Caesar heard me cussing, and he came slinking out mighty sheepish. I gave him a look, and blamed if he wan't trembling! I went to the henhouse and I see by the way the lower part of the door was sprung and the peg all skeejawed around, something good and strong thrun some weight against it. Two hens missing, one that was a-laying there on the ground, and another gone slick and clean!"

All this wouldn't have got the district too excited, but there was something else. The dogs simply refused to trail the critter. The Coulter boys and Marv Parsons had coon dogs, and Pete Frazer foxhounds, but those dogs wouldn't take the scent. They just sniffed around the farmyards and then quit cold, with a look that as much as said, "Sorry, this just ain't in our line."

Now, up to that time nobody had seen hide nor hair of anything, but one night Merle Biggins, who lived over on Maple Grove Road, heard a go-round in his sheep pen, and he up and out with his gun — not waiting to get a lantern, for it was moonlight; and when he busted out the back door there was his old Shep holding up one foot and whimpering, but not making a move.

"Why, dang you, Shep!" Merle squalled. "Get outa the way if your belly's turned yellow!" He kicked at him and went raring down to the pen and shed. The sheep were in a lather, tearing around and bleating, and when he made a fast count one of the lambs was missing.

Merle squinted around, under that three-quarter moon, and up toward the foot of the hills back of his place he saw something big and black sort of galloping along, and he thought he caught a glimpse of white, like maybe the lamb was in the thing's

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mouth. So Merle up with his twelve-gauge and banged away, more to ease his feelings than anything else, for the range was too long for a shotgun, and when he lowered the gun and took another look, the thing was gone.

Next morning he was down to Delbert Tomkins' grist mill at Hickock's Corners, and naturally he embellished the story a little.

"Danged thing was big's a calf and black as midnight!" he told the farmers who were in with their feed wagons. "Its fur kind of glistened in the moonlight. When I shot at it, it turned around and glared at me, holding the lamb in its mouth, and its eyes blazed like fire."

Delbert's tongue was hinged in the middle, and between him and the farmers who listened to Merle, the story went all over the district. Farmers whose places lay at the foot of the hills vowed to set a watch over their sheep pens and henhouses and see if they couldn't get a crack at this varmint.

That afternoon the Seven Thrifty Sewers Club was meeting to Mrs. Irv Whitcomb's place on Shanower Road.

"Kind of scairy," the widow Bartlett said, settling back in a wing-chair, her hands fluttering over her hemstitching, "something prowl-prowling around amongst our places at night, soft-like, a-taking and a-taking, big and hot-breathy, and nobody a-knowing what it be."

"Oh, stuff!" said bosomy Mrs. Kilrain. "I'm a mind Merle made it up for a joke." But the others rejected the idea immediately.

"Oh, no, Pauline," Mrs. Parsons protested. "Merle, he lost a lamb, all right. And we lost a couple hens last week. That makes five farms on Applegate Road."

"Turn out t'be a fox, prob'ly," Mrs. Kilrain said.

"But the dogs won't trail!" put in Mrs. Dunlap.

"And the henhouse doors . . . all twisted!" said Mrs. Morse.

"Well," Mrs. Kilrain demanded, "just what *did* Merle say he saw?"

The widow Bartlett dropped her needlework in her lap, her eyes looking afar. "Big and black," she said dreamily, "the innocent lamb in its teeth, and kind of galloping away into the hills." She lowered her voice. "Look for a cloven hoof, I says!"

Mrs. Irv Whitcomb stared. "Big and black . . . kind of galloping . . . Good land o' Goshen!"

She was out of the room in a rush, startling them, and they stared at her rocker still rocking away as if she was in it. Presently she came back loaded down with an armful of newspapers. A great newspaper saver, Mrs. Whitcomb was, but everybody kind of saved papers those days. They got the city papers a day or two late on rural delivery.

Mrs. Whitcomb pawed through the back issues. "I *know* I seen it here not too long ago," she said. And then she let out a little cry of triumph. "Here it is!" She hunted for the

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dateline. "The third . . . let's see . . . three weeks ago. Look!"

They gathered around, peering over her shoulders, pushing glasses up, or down, as the case warranted. It was a brief account in the middle of the page. How the Dunbar Brothers Circus had lost a valuable panther. A dangerous animal, it said. Five hundred dollars reward. A keeper told of finding the cage door open and the panther gone when the circus train arrived in Portersville. The keeper was positive, he said, that the panther was in its cage when the train left Bolton. The panther's name was Satan.

"The train goes across the northeast corner of the county," Mrs. Morse breathed.

"Not ten miles from here," Mrs. Parsons added.

"Yes, but its 80 miles from Bolton to Portersville," Mrs. Kilrain objected. "It could have escaped anywhere along the line. No reason to think ——"

"Satan!" the widow Bartlett gasped. "I told you! Satan!" She nodded her head rapidly.

A panther, a dangerous animal. That got around the district fast. People began going through old newspapers, pulling them off jelly cupboard shelves, out from under butter crocks on cellar floors, hunting the one that told about the circus animal. And when everybody had read it, the county began to get scared. Not in the daytime. Not with the sun shining down and work to be done. A cat is a night animal, sleeping by day and slinking around under the moon; and when the crickets began their evening song and dusk settled gently down, the district tensed up, moved jerkily, and watched from the corners of its eyes. Mothers spoke sharply to children wanting to linger outside, and hired men, plodding late up the pasture lanes, eyed every bush and took to peering over their shoulders.

Each morning some fresh depredation was reported and multiplied in the telling, now on the creek road . . . now Applegate . . . over Maple Grove way, but at last a pattern took shape. The raids were confined to a limited area, the farms bounded by Applegate Road, Maple Grove, and the river road that ran through Hickock's Corners, a rough square whose fourth side was the hill called Little Mountain.

In Chatfield's General Store at the Corners, Carl Morse held forth. "Ain't safe for women and children t'be out after dark. I say the thing's holing up on Little Mountain. We got to get us a posse and hunt it down!"

"Trouble is," old man Dunlap said, shifting his chew, "the danged dogs won't trail it, an' can't say's I blame 'em. What you figure on, tramping that whole blamed mountain over? All you'll do is kick it out ahead of you and never see it. It'll circle around behind you laffin' itself sick."

The picture he conjured up was not heartening. Other farmers in

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Chatfield's nodded, no one offered himself as a posse member, and some decided privately that setting a watch over henhouses wasn't worth it either, all things considered. What was a twelve- or sixteen-gauge shotgun against a jungle critter you couldn't hardly see until maybe it was too late?

But down Applegate Road, at the very foot of Little Mountain, Bill and Bob, the Coulter twins, were too riled up mad to be scared. Didn't aim to keep *their* kids in the house forever for no damned cat, big or small, or worry and fuss about hens and stock. To say nothing about having the livers pestered out of them by their aunt, the widow Bartlett who lived on the next place over, with her constant jabbering about Satan and cloven hooves and being scared to stay alone. So the twins got down their heavy deer rifles, cleaned and oiled them, and talked it over.

"What we need," Bob said, "is a dog ain't scared to trail this here panther. Once we find out where he's a-laying ——"

"Ain't but one dog like that around," Bill said. "Old Major Tattersall's Bones."

"That's the one," Bob agreed.

"Come to think of it, I ain't seen the major around lately."

"Maybe," Bob suggested, "he's down to the county infirmary again. Funny geezer, the major."

They sat in silence thinking about it while they put the deer rifles in working order. A gigantic gaunt old man, Bide Tattersall claimed to have been a major in the Union Army. None ever called old Bide a liar to his face, and anyway he had one thing that kind of proved it, a Union officer's blue greatcoat, and he was as proud of it as the knights of old were of their armor. Hardly ever seen without it save in the hottest weather, and Old Bide, muffled to the chin in that greatcoat, with the gray mastiff, Bones, at his side, was a familiar figure striding along the roads of the district. He lived on his soldier's pension, and had a cottage up on the ridge for him and Bones. Bide Tattersall claimed a rifle ball had creased his skull at Shiloh, Tenn. Sometimes the skull-ache made him go kind of queer; but he could always tell, he said, when a spell was coming on, and then he'd take Bones down the other side of the ridge and leave him with his neighbor, Leeland Stack, and walk the fifteen miles to the county infirmary at Conroy Village. Major Bide would stay there till he was all right again, and then come home.

"Well, let's be going," Bill Coulter said, "if we're gonna ask the major to borrow Bones. It's quite a walk up there."

They took the deer rifles along just in case and began to foot it up the Little Mountain road. The dirt track wound up for half a mile under a canopy of trees, then leveled out for a ways into the ridge that circled the lower section of the mountain. They walked silently, with the distance-eating stride of country men,

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and all they saw was dappled sunlight on the pine beds, saucy jays, and frisking woodpeckers, and now and then a chipmunk and a slithering grass snake. They made the ridge and moved along it for another mile, and there on the right stood Bide Tattersall's little house under a great elm.

"Bones shoulda winded us and been out by now," Bob said in a low voice.

The cottage had a vacant sightless look, but just for luck Bill called out politely, "Major Tattersall. . . . Major Tattersall, sir! Anyone about?"

No answer save an echo off Little Mountain's rising face, and Bob shrugged. "Ain't here."

"Now we come this far," Bill said. "Might as well cut down to Stack's and see if he's got Bones."

When they got to his place, Stack, a shiftless man, was resting on his shoulder blades under a pear tree, and he pulled himself up grudgingly to greet them. "Howdy, boys. Why the shooting irons? You hunting that wildcat that's loose over in your section?"

"Just looking around," Bill said. "You see Major Tattersall or Bones?"

"Yup," Stack said, picking his teeth. "I got Bones on a line out back. The major, he felt another queer spell coming on couple weeks back and lit out for the 'firmary."

"We'd like t'borrow Bones t'do a little hunting," Bill said. "Don't expect the major'd care, d'you?"

Stack hesitated and Bob spoke up. "We'll take care of Bones, Lee. We'll keep him on a chain. We just want to find out where this thing's holing up. We'll be responsible for Bones."

"Well, all right," Stack said. "If you will. Guess the major'd be willing. Come on, I'll give you a chain."

When they got Bones home they gave the big gray boy a pan of cool water in the shade and a good feed. Bones ate as if maybe Stack hadn't been too generous, then he heaved a sigh and flopped down, looking at them with his tough knowing eyes like he was saying, "So, what next?"

Bob chuckled. "He'll do! I'll snap his chain to this here clothes wire, so he can move around, and we can put him in the barn nights. We'll just have to wait till that cat cuts up some more didos somewhere, and then we'll see."

They didn't have long to wait. About 3 o'clock in the morning Bob's wife shook him awake.

"Listen!"

The frantic jerky clanging of Aunt Minnie Bartlett's dinner bell cut into his sleepiness, and Bob hit the floor on the jump and was out in the hall yelling for Bill. The twins hustled into some clothes wordlessly, grabbed their rifles and a lantern, and took off on the run, and all the while that dinner bell kept clanging enough to wake the dead.

They had to take the widow Bartlett's hands off the bell rope by main force. She was standing on the back stoop in a wrapper, a lantern at her feet, mouth contorted, and a wild

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glazed look in her eyes. They got her inside and into a kitchen chair, but they couldn't get much sense out of her.

Bob slipped out for a moment, and when he returned he said quietly, "Henhouse door pushed in. Blood and feathers. Guess it was here."

"He was!" The widow's voice rose hysterically, then she moaned and covered her face with her hands. "Satan was here! I saw him!"

"Please, Auntie," Bill urged, "tell us what happened. Bob and me aim to get this panther varmint."

"Varmint?" she cried. "Oh, no, Satan it was!"

"Well," Bill said edgily, "Satan, panther, varmint, whatever you want t'call it. Now, Auntie, please!"

She made a real effort. "I — I heard a noise outside, and I came down. I didn't want to, but something seemed to make me. I lit a lantern and — and went out on the stoop. He was crouching right there in the yard, gnawing on one of my hens, a-tearing at the feathers. Oh, horrible!" She raised her hands to her eyes again and began to shudder.

"What'd it look like, Auntie?" Bill urged sharply.

"Monstrous big and black," she whispered. "Mouth all bloody . . . the devil's face, Satan himself! Snarled at me and scurried away in the dark."

In spite of themselves the twins were shaken.

"Shall I get Bones?" said Bill.

Bob considered. "Only two hours till daylight. Track won't cool off too much, and I'd a sight rather see where I'm going. Go get Ma to stay with Auntie. We'll start out with Bones soon's it's light."

The sun had not yet risen, but dawn was in the sky and near objects were visible when the twins, leading Bones, returned to the Bartlett farmyard. If there was any thought in their minds that he might act like the shepherds had, it was quickly erased, for the mastiff sniffed over the yard eagerly, a small whimper of sound in his throat, and they could sense his rising excitement. They grinned at each other in satisfaction, and then Bones started off with a rush, nearly jerking Bill from his feet.

"I knew he'd do it!" Bob exulted, swinging his rifle high. "Good old Bones!"

The dog moved forward eagerly, the little whimper in his throat, and hauling Bill along like a monkey on a string. He led them a merry three-hour chase, sturdy legs churning, through the fields, across the corner of Parsons' meadow and woodlot, then circling back, and shortly after 8 they were moving up a timber slash that led to the Little Mountain ridge. Suddenly Bones stopped stock still, stuck his great blunt nose in the air and seemed to test the wind, ears pricked. Then without warning he gave a great lunge, ripping the chain from Bill's hand, and went kiting up the grade, and disappeared.

Cursing fervently, Bill danced

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around, holding his hand where the skin was ripped off by the chain jerk, and Bob stared.

"Well, where in the devil's *he* going?"

"Damn him," Bill said feelingly. "Hope he runs right into that panther! Hope he sticks his ugly head smack in its mouth!"

Bob grunted. "We got to follow him. We're responsible."

They changed course, moving along briskly, climbing, and soon they neared the rim of the ridge.

"Know where we're gonna come out?" said Bob.

"Sure. Ridge Road, pretty close to the major's cottage."

Bob nodded and they went silently up over the rim and onto the ridge plateau, stepped out on the road, and sure enough, there was the major's place a hundred yards to their left. On the tiny porch the major himself, in his shirt sleeves, sat quietly rocking, one hand absently fondling Bones, who lolled happily beside him. The twins waited for him to speak out as custom dictated, but he didn't, so they moved toward the cottage anyhow. When they were just below it Bob said, "Morning, Major."

Major Bide started. "Good — good morning."

"We thought you was down t'the inf — the county seat," Bill said.

The major frowned. "No," he said. "Uh, that is, I *was*, but I got to feeling better, so I —" He stopped and seemed to ponder for a time, and then he added, "I come back."

The twins exchanged a glance. The major looked a little off his feed, eyes sunken, beard ragged and yellow, not his usual style, and his big hands trembly.

"We took the liberty of borrowing Bones," Bob said. "We got him off Stack to hunt down a varmint. He was trailing on the hill, and I guess he decided you was back. He broke away from us and came a-sailing up here. Hope you didn't mind our using him."

"What? Oh, no. No I didn't mind." He stroked Bones, and when the twins kept standing there he bestirred himself as if in thought. "You want to take Bones now?"

"If you don't mind, Major."

"No, I don't. Go down to them, Bones. Go down, sir!"

The mastiff went unwillingly, dragging the chain, and Bob picked it up. "We're obliged to you, Major. We'll bring him home soon."

Bide Tattersall didn't answer, so they turned, feeling awkward, and moved away leading the reluctant mastiff. They walked down the road a long way out of earshot before Bob spoke again.

"Funny. Guess he come back too soon."

"Yeah," Bill agreed, "guess he did."

"Too late to pick up that cold track now. I don't even remember just where we were when Bones bolted."

"Nor I, neither," Bill said.

"Time we spend another hour casting around it'll be stone cold. Bones

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ain't got a hound's nose. Better wait for another try."

"Guess we had."

The zest had slipped out of the day somehow, and they didn't know why. But when they came down into the valley, lying hot under the high sun, and turned into their own farmyard, something happened to change the whole complexion of the affair. Marv Parsons was standing on the porch talking to Bill's wife, and now he came hustling out across the yard, eager and anxious.

"Find anything?"

"Trail got cold," Bob said briefly.

"Well, *we* found something!" There was hot excitement in Marv, and the twins felt their interest reviving. "Me and my oldest boy, Sam, was on the knoll this morning hunting genseng. Just above the ridge we run smack into the mouth of a kind of den where a big oak'd uprooted above a little hollow and made an overhang. Something's been going in and out, and fresh chicken bones scattered around!"

Bill began, "See anything —"

"Hell, no! We lit out fast! Us with a couple baskets on our arms. Didn't aim to tangle with no panther!"

"Find the place again, can you?"

"Sure."

"Take us up and show us?"

"Well. . . . Wanta get my shotgun. I talked Dunlap and Merle Biggins into saying they'd go along if you fellows went. All we got is twelve-gauges. Feel a lot better behind your rifles."

It was late afternoon before the six — Bill and Bob, Marv Parsons, Merle Biggins, Dunlap, and Bones on his chain — had pushed up the ridge to the place where Parsons motioned for them to stop.

"Now," he whispered, "right up off the road here to our left, 'bout a hundred yards in."

They scrambled up, Merle taking Bones' chain to leave the twins free with their rifles, and slipped quietly into the woods. Presently they came to the edge of a glade.

Parsons pointed nervously. "See that little knoll? Just beyond's the hollow. See that overhang there? That's the uprooted oak. There's a clutter of chicken bones on the knoll."

Bill said guardedly, "Bob and me'll go up. If he gets by us he'll have lead in him. Let Bones loose; if he does, and blaze away."

The twins slipped forward softly, crossed the glade and crept slowly up the knoll. They peered down into the den. Hard-packed earth. A welter of bones, a lamb skin. A stench. The den was vacant.

The brothers came back. "Ain't there," Bob said, "but that's his place. We'll wait."

"Wait?" Merle Biggins' voice was shrill. "How long? Not into dark?"

Bill looked at him. "Came to get him, didn't we? Nobody's got to wait that don't want to. Bob and me'll stay."

Parsons, old man Dunlap, and Merle studied each other. Old man

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Dunlap shrugged and spit. "If they're game I am."

"Well —" Parsons said. "Well —"

"All right," Merle said. "We're a bunch of damn' fools, but all right!"

"Be a moon later," Bob said, "but I'd like to have our dark lantern. We could use some sandwiches, too. I'd go back myself, or Bill would, but rifles are the best up here. Marv, will you go? My wife'll fix some grub on the run, and don't forget the lantern. Hate to ask you, but ——"

"Sure," Parsons said with alacrity. "Glad to."

They settled down to wait, and the peace of the woods gradually eased the tension. They began to talk in low tones of everyday things — crops and feed prices, county doings. Parsons came back at sundown with the lantern and a basket of food. They ate standing up, as the shadows lengthened, and Bones fared as well as the rest. They finished in silence. Bob lit the dark lantern and closed the opening. Bill stationed them against trees around the rim of the glade. It was full dark now.

They settled down to wait. Time ran and ran on the spool, and nothing happened.

"Wish to lordy I could smoke," Merle groaned at last.

"Go ahead," Bob said.

A match flared briefly over Merle's pipe, showing for an instant his strained face. Then darkness and silence. Not complete darkness, for the moon rode up now, throwing soft radiance into the glade, a half-light; and the silence only a woods silence, punctured by the cry of tree toad and cricket, the owl's call, soft vague plops, swishes and whirs, that told of a world of night creatures abroad.

From far below came a familiar sound. The squawk of a hen.

"Ssh!" old man Dunlap rasped. "You hear that?"

They heard it again. Faint still, but nearer.

Bones whimpered deep in his chest, and Bob said fiercely, "Be quiet, sir!" He handed the chain to Parsons. "Keep him still, Marv!"

They stood for an eternity, then the hen squawked again very close down below them. They listened till their eardrums like to burst, hearts thudding, neck hair crawling. Then a snuffling panting sound behind them nearly sucked their hearts right out. A soft pad-padding and the thing was right in the glade, a great black shadow slinking toward the den opening.

Two sheets of flame as Bill and Bob fired together. A high tearing scream seared the night. They'd heard how a panther screams. They braced themselves for the rip of flesh-tearing claws and fangs, but instead came a scrambling, and the swish of bushes. Then silence. Bones gave a great howl, lunged, broke away from Marv, and rushed toward the den.

"Back, Bones, back!" Bill yelled. But Bones was gone. They waited fearfully, expecting sounds of mortal combat, but there was no sound at all. Nothing.

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"We got him!" Bill exulted.

"Have to wait," Bob warned.

And waiting for daybreak was the hardest job the five Conroy men had ever tackled. But they did it, with the lantern on the ground out in the glade where Bob carried it. At intervals Bill called, "Bones, Bones!" and got no answer. Finally he gave up, and the five of them stood like stone men, guns at the ready in cramped hands. But at last daylight sifted into the glade, paling the lantern; birds twittered and frisked in the trees, and a chipmunk ran into the open and stared curiously. It was light.

Three pairs of eyes in grim faces questioned Bill and Bob. The twins looked at each other. "You ready?" Bill said.

Bob nodded. They began to inch slowly up the knoll, guns well out in front of them. They were at the top now. One more step and they would look down into the den under the oak roots. They stood there and stared. Bob turned and motioned for the others to come up. Now all five were standing on the knoll gazing down unbelievingly. At the great body sprawled there. At the dead pullet.

Bones was lying there, too, head on forepaws, eyes mournful. The blue greatcoat was splotched and splattered with blood and grime. Blood and dirt matted the beard. But there was no madness marring the tired old face. Major Bide Tattersall was at peace.

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A WOMAN CAN KILL

by RAOUL WHITFIELD

HE WAS TALL AND SCRAGGLY LOOKing and the colors on the band of his straw hat brightened up the office a lot. Just inside the door he halted; smoke from a cigarette, that dangled just a little from full lips, curled past a left ear that wasn't shaped much like the other. Blue eyes squinted at me.

"You Dion Davies?" he asked.

"I am Dion Davies," I told him. "And sure 'tis an Irish name that me mither was proud of."

"Your brogue's rotten," he said disgustedly. "I'm damn' sure your mither wouldn't be proud of *that*."

He did a better job on the word "mither" than I'd done. Got more roll to the "r", and the cigarette still stayed between his lips.

I said: "I'm sorry, Mr. McQuirter. Circumstances have forced me to move, ofttimes, in circles of culture and refinement. In so doing I have, perhaps unconsciously —"

McQuirter's long face smiled in several places.

"Say — what we getting like *this* for?" he demanded cheerfully. "Maybe it's the heat, eh? The boss told me you were a good guy. And me — I got a reputation for being right."

I said: "Sure you have, Mac. You don't mind if I call you Mac, do you? Somehow, I feel as though we've known each other for a long time."

The cigarette he was holding just below the level of his chin rolled from his fingers into the palm of his hand. He closed the hand until it made a white knuckled fist. Smiling at me, he opened the hand slowly and surprise showed in his blue eyes as he looked at it. He whistled softly.

"Look what I done!" he said.

I smiled and nodded. "I noticed it, Mac. A symbol, wasn't it?"

There was a brief silence.

"I don't get you," he said quietly.

I pointed to the waste-basket, and then to a chair.

"Dump the pill and squat," I suggested.

While he was doing it Julie came in and handed me a telegram. I held it while she said:

"Everything is under control in the Faber case, Mr. Davies. Marks has just reported in from Cleveland. Rader and Leftovich are using the files. Connelly won't be in tomorrow. Mr. Dancer will telephone you tomorrow at 10, from Chicago."

I said: "Thanks, Miss Ryan. Finish up those letters, please."

She said: "Yes, sir," and went out.

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McQuirter eased his scraggliness into a chair at one end of my desk.

"So we *both* can put on an act, eh, Dion?" he said pleasantly. "You don't mind my calling you Dion, do you? Somehow, I feel as though I'd known you a long time."

I tore open the envelope of the telegram and unfolded the yellow paper. Julie's even handwriting was easy to read. "Gun in left hip pocket — bumped into him outside purposely — left-handed."

Folding the yellow paper, I replaced it in the envelope, nodded thoughtfully, slipped the envelope in a drawer of the desk.

"My real intimate friends call me Dee, Mac," I said without looking at him. "And I want you to feel right at home with me."

McQuirter got a very clean handkerchief from his coat pocket, carefully tied a knot in one corner. He leaned back in the chair, held the handkerchief between two fingers by another corner and swung the knotted end in a slow circle.

" 'Dancer and Davies, Limited,' " he recited slowly. "The second biggest detective agency in New York, and maybe tougher than the first biggest."

He grinned. "They say around Broadway that Dancer was a lawyer, and a smart one. Maybe too smart. So now he's a senior partner. A quiet partner."

I looked at the electric clock. "They say around Broadway that Jim McQuirter is as smart a fellow as Joey Tay, only so far he hasn't had the breaks. So now he's Joey's right-hand man."

McQuirter swung the knotted handkerchief slowly, his blue eyes watching the swing.

"A lady by the name of —"

He broke off, looked at me sharply. "This is just between the two of us, Dee," he said.

I nodded. "Private chat." I opened the lower left drawer of my desk a few inches, which cut in the dictograph, put my feet on the drawer.

"A lady named Greenway," he went on — "Sylvia Greenway — owns the old *American Theatre* near Ninth on 42nd. She's about 80 years old, a sort of crusader. You know — when she gets an idea she stays with it. She's been running highbrow plays for the poor in her theatre, for years. And losing plenty. Lately the poor have been getting poorer and she's been losing too much. A couple of weeks ago she leased the theatre for ten years to a guy named Reginald Fox."

I nodded. "Read about that — a theatrical man from the West. Had an arty theatre out in Seattle or some place. Came into some money and felt that he could carry on Mrs. Greenway's ideas, only in a better way. Calls the new spot *The American Gardens.*"

"Yeah," he said. "That was the idea. Then something funny happened. This fellow Fox changed his mind. He figured maybe a beer spot in the theatre would go better. It's a big house; he could run entertain-

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ment on the stage, even use the balconies. The location was right — a thirsty neighborhood and not so far from Broadway. So he started alterations."

I whistled a few bars from a tap-dance song. McQuirter looked at me.

"The old lady got wise, found out what was going to happen. That was about a week ago. She started to raise hell. You see — she's been dead against the return of beer. She crusaded against it for years."

I grinned. "Didn't Joey Tay know that when he sent in his man Fox?"

McQuirter looked hurt. "You don't think Joey would worry about *that*, do you, Dee?"

I lighted a cigarette. McQuirter shrugged. "There was a lot of lawyer talk, but Fox had the lease and it didn't say anything about not changing things around and serving beer. The old lady had fallen hard for his art talk."

I said: "Well, what's worrying Joey?"

McQuirter frowned. "The old lady's a scrapper," he said. "She owns half a block directly across from the theatre. Some empty stores and a few with short leases. She bought up the short leases and a couple of days ago a big squad of workmen started in. Want a guess?"

I widened my eyes a little. "Don't tell me the old lady hit on the one scheme to make Joey yelp," I said "Not *another* beer garden, maybe a *better* one, to give him too much competition?"

McQuirter said bitterly: "You guessed it the first time. With a million or more fish behind her, and plenty of fight, even at 80. And to make it worse — she can fix an entrance on Ninth Avenue and she's on the best side of 42nd."

I grinned. "And as soon as Joey's licked — she'll close up."

McQuirter swore. "Sure — and go back to losing money on orange juice and chocolate nut bars. But that won't help Joey any. He's got a lot of coin sunk in the lease and in contracts for fixing over."

"Well, well," I said. "That's what Joey gets for trying to rob the cradle."

McQuirter untied the knots in the handkerchief and narrowed his eyes.

"The boss suggested Dancer and Davies for a tailing job," he said.

I stared at him. "Frame the old lady — at 80?"

McQuirter didn't smile. "Ever hear of Nancy Gale?"

I nodded. "Park Avenue stuff. Composes tone poems. Sings once in a while. Had a concert at Carnegie not long ago. A looker. Engaged to Jason Cummings — lawyer and definite dry."

McQuirter chuckled. "You been reading the papers. Well, Nancy is the old lady's granddaughter. And her weak spot. That's the big point — Sylvia Greenway thinks Nancy couldn't do wrong. She's crazy about her — and her tone poems and her dry husband to be."

I waited. McQuirter lifted a lean

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finger and pointed it directly at me.

"The boss wants Nancy tailed. And about three nights a week you can pick her up at the *Tree Club*. Upstairs, where the boys and girls try to beat the cards and wheels."

I looked at McQuirter thoughtfully. He stood up, ran the handkerchief across his forehead, put it away.

"Retainer?" he asked.

I said: "A hundred to start."

He tossed the hundred on my desk without much fuss. I said:

"Receipt?"

He shook his head. "The boss and me — we've got good memories."

I took my feet off the desk drawer and stood up. McQuirter said:

"The sooner we get the reports — the better. And the tougher they are for the old lady to look at — the better. And the easier they are for the newspapers to grab — the better."

His tall, scraggly body reached the door; a lean arm was lifted. The door opened and he went out.

I shut off the dictograph, lit a cigarette from the tip of my short one. After a few seconds Julie came in, walked to the chair McQuirter had vacated, sat down.

Her dark eyes were narrowed and her fine lips pressed closely together. I looked at her black hair, almost jet, in the reddish light of the low sun. Her features were small and strong.

"Well, Miss Dancer?" I said slowly. "Joey Tay and Jim McQuirter. Two Chicago boys who made good in a bigger city. They're tough, fast and smooth. You listened in on the little bed time story. Do we stall out?"

Julie lifted her head and smiled.

"Stall hell!" She said simply. "We'll ease right *into* it!"

The American Gardens weren't doing much business. Julie and I sat near the big stage, on the lower floor, mixed up in a lot of rustic benches, tables and considerable fake foliage. On the stage there was a brass band, yodelers and singing waiters. It was 9 o'clock and the night was hot.

Julie looked nice in a simple sport dress and a tiny hat. She was a quiet little package — to look at, with the odds a hundred to one you'd not guess the kind of dynamite behind those dark eyes of hers.

I'd been getting along, moderately, in my solo agency at the old Sixth Avenue address; then I had a break that rated first-page space. On the strength of that advertising, I'd always supposed, Julie Hazard blew in one morning with a check and a proposition.

We kept the D.—D. idea, but made it Dancer and Davies. She was never Stephen Dancer, although she picked the name and insisted on playing the incognito role of the senior partner. Said the slight mystery end wouldn't hurt our business and would always give me the chance to stall.

She worked something of the same racket on me. Told me her name was really Hazard, that she'd come from some spot she mentioned in Pennsyl-

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vania and that I could look her up if I wanted to.

I'd never found the time to do it; and what's more, as the weeks went by and business went over the peak, it didn't seem necessary. She fitted all the way. But the mystery of her antecedents, how she came to be the way she was, *did* keep me thinking about her, more, perhaps, than I should.

She was Miss Julie Ryan, secretary-stenographer, to the clients and casual callers.

"Still like the racket, Julie?"

She smiled. "More than ever."

I grinned. "You know, for the last six months your agency has been making fair money."

"Our agency," she corrected. "We're in it fifty-fifty. In a few more months you can square things up."

I said: "It's a possibility. And Joey Tay may help me a lot."

Julie said: "*Trammer's* is doing better business than this spot."

She sipped her beer. "The answer's easy," I said. "Sylvia Greenway is doing everything in a bigger way. Her place hands out more free stuff. There wasn't room for two spots here, anyway. She's a shrewd old lady. It'll cost her some money, but Tay's licked right now. In a couple more weeks she can get this spot back from Tay, and have some profit at that."

Julie said with admiration in her voice: "She's a spunky woman."

"Almost a fanatic," I replied. "But I like her guts, too. And Joey tricked her into getting this spot. This is a funny thing, too — Joey Tay hiring a private detective agency for a push-over. Joey's too tough to act that way."

The German band made terrific sound. Julie shivered.

"I'm pretty crazy about you, Julie," I said. "I wish ——"

She waved a cheaply gloved finger at me. "Going sentimental, Mr. Davies? *That* wasn't in our contract."

She leaned back and looked me over. "Brown hair, slightly curly. Brown eyes, slightly squinted. Nose slightly long. Rather nice lips —"

I interrupted softly: "Easy — McQuirter!"

Julie threw back her head and laughed. "Oh, I really couldn't go to Atlantic City with you," she said rather loudly. "After all — that —"

McQuirter said: "Hello."

I said the same thing as he looked down at Julie. He kept on looking.

"Don't do it, lady," he said, finally. "Never trust your boss." He looked at me. "Can the steno take a walk to the ladies' parlor and powder her nose?"

"Sure she can," I replied. "Would you like her to do that?"

Julie rose, smiled at me. "I'll run along home. I'm worried about Tim, anyway. Good night, Mr. Marvin."

I told her good night. McQuirter sat on my right.

"Smart girl," he said. "She even knows when to use wrong names."

I nodded. "It's my careful training," I said. "Have a beer?"

He scowled at me. "Hell, no. I don't drink beer when I can get good stuff."

There was a short silence. "How's business?" I asked, breaking it.

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McQuirter swore. "It's just as bad as we figured it would be, with the spot across the street."

"Too bad," I muttered, and shook my head. "One spot along here could clean up."

McQuirter made the pebbles under his feet scatter.

"Listen, Mr. Dion Davies," he said softly and slowly, "you wouldn't play games with the boss, would you?"

"Games?" I said.

McQuirter leaned across the table. "The reports your office has been turning in on Nancy Gale for the past week — they don't mean much."

"That so?" I replied. "The critics praised her latest tone poem."

McQuirter said: "Listen, Dee — the boss sent 500 over to you a couple of days ago. That makes a total of 600 you've had. And what do *we* get? Nancy Gale giving concerts at the *Colony Club*, dining with this fellow Cummings, staying at home."

He broke off. "Well?" I said.

McQuirter leaned back a little. "You were within five feet of her at the *Tree Club*, three nights ago. You saw her gambling. You heard the way she talked to Jerry Salem. And you know Jerry's a big-shot gambler, if there ever was one. You saw Nancy at the bar — you saw her dancing, upstairs, with Jerry. She left with Jerry — and maybe you know where she went."

McQuirter's voice was low and sharp. "All that *wasn't* in the reports. I had a man tailing *you*, Dee. That's how I know what you saw. But we didn't get it in the reports. What we got was that Nancy Gale remained at home.

"You know about Joey Tay, Dee. He doesn't stand for doublecrossing."

I said: "Sure — I like that in a guy. And he wouldn't want to doublecross me, would he?"

"Meaning what?" he said softly.

"The girl he *planted* at the *Tree Club looks* a hell of a lot like Nancy Gale," I said softly. "But she *isn't* Nancy Gale, and that's why he didn't get the reports he wanted."

McQuirter sucked in a deep, slow breath.

"Sure you didn't make a mistake, Dee?" he asked, after a few seconds.

I nodded. "Positive," I replied. "It was Joey Tay who made the mistake."

McQuirter said grimly: "How?"

"Dancer and Davies isn't that sort of an agency," I said quietly. "If it's a tailing job — that's okay. We play fair and report straight. But we don't frame anybody for somebody else."

"Too bad, Dee — too bad. Joey was saying to me, after I told him that you'd spotted the Gale kid in the *Tree Club:* 'I think we should send Davies five grand, Mac, when those reports come in.'"

I smiled at McQuirter. "It's a lot of money, Mac. But the office doesn't work that way. We don't have to."

"Joey *might* think the reports would be worth ten grand," he said thoughtfully.

I shook my head. "He wouldn't get them for fifty grand, Mac. What do you think of that?"

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"I think you're a fool, Davies!" he said harshly.

I shrugged.

"This means big money to Tay, Davies. Big money — get that? You had a chance to do a job that you were paid for. Who'd you sell out to, the Greenway lady or the girl?"

I laughed at him. "Don't get rough, Mac. You wanted Nancy Gale followed. You wanted reports on her. You paid for them, and you got them."

McQuirter looked at me coldly.

"Okay," he said. "We're calling it quits, eh?"

I nodded. McQuirter half rose from his chair, then sat down again. He said very quietly:

"You *think* you know something, Davies. But you don't, see? And if you go to Sylvia Greenway, or to the Gale kid —"

"We don't go after clients — they come to us," I said.

"Yeah," he breathed. "But if we should learn that either of these two had come to you, and you were working for them —"

I cut in. "We're a well-known agency, McQuirter. If they got in trouble they just might come to us."

McQuirter smiled nastily. "Maybe. But you'd turn down the job — either job — whatever either of 'em wanted. And you'd keep your mouth closed. Make like you know nothing."

I said: "Would we, McQuirter?"

He stood up and smiled at me.

"Sure you would, Dee," he said cheerfully. "You got brains, and you want to keep 'em, don't you?"

He waved a hand carelessly and turned his back on me. I signaled a waiter and paid for the beer. He had to change a $10 bill and went away from the table to do it. It seemed to take a lot of time. After almost five minutes he came back with the change, and apologies.

I got up and walked between tables and fake foliage, over gravel, towards the entrance of the beer garden. In what had been the foyer of the theatre I stopped and swallowed a mint to take the taste of the beer away. There was a drizzle of rain on the street.

On the pavement there was a lot of light and no taxis. I waited a few seconds, then decided the chances would be better on Ninth Avenue. Pulling my soft hat over my eyes, I turned towards Ninth. The rain was coming down more heavily, and I couldn't spot a cab. I crossed 42nd and went downtown towards 41st.

Halfway between the two streets I stopped. There were few people walking; traffic wasn't heavy. Behind me there was the sound of someone running fast. I swung around. The man passed me with his head down, gasping for breath. He was trying to cry out something that sounded like: "For God's sake — don't —"

No one was running after him. I swung towards the curb, saw the closed car coming along, rolling downtown on the wrong side of the street. The running man must have been a quarter of a block past me.

The rear, curb-facing window of the car was down; a black curtain flapped

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as the car rolled on. I swung my body as it passed.

When the sub-caliber gun shoved the curtain to one side it wasn't pointed towards the running man. I ripped at my rear right pocket for my Colt, but it didn't come loose. As I was reaching for it I dived for the curb, breaking the heaviness of the fall with my extended left hand.

Bullets drummed along the sidewalk behind me. My left shoe jerked. I crawled out on the soaked street as the clatter of gunfire died. The closed car pulled between elevated girders, reached the right side of the avenue, and picked up speed. I got to my feet, limped to the nearest girder and leaned against it. The cloth over my left knee was ripped; the skin was scraped.

A uniformed cop crossed from the other side of Ninth.

"Shooting, eh?" he yelled at me above the racket from the El train. "They get you?"

I shook my head. The cop said: "Know who tried it?"

I shook my head again. The cop said: "Get the license?"

I shook my head once more. The cop said: "Got any enemies?"

I looked puzzled. "Enemies, officer? I'm the friend of man. I think there was a mistake."

The cop grabbed my arm. "Let's get the hell out of the wet," he muttered. "I got questions to ask."

We moved towards the curb. "Right *now*," I said cheerfully, "I can tell you I don't know the answers."

Julie sat opposite my desk, with a shorthand note book ready for action. The note book didn't mean a thing.

"Kelly's no good," she stated firmly. "I want him fired."

I said: "Okay, Mr. Dancer."

Her dark eyes smiled a little. "Rader is one of our best men. I think you should have him closer to you."

I said: "Very well, Mr. Dancer."

She frowned at me. "Anything new on the Tay-Greenway case?"

I smiled more broadly. "Yeah. After you left last night, McQuirter told me some things. He said we'd call it quits — only if Mrs. Greenway or Nancy Gale came into the office, we were not to take them as clients. And we were to keep quiet about what we knew. I sugested we might not do either of those little things.

"I went over to Ninth to pick up a taxi," I went on. "A pretty good actor ran past me, making sounds as though it was his finish. Then a car came along on the wrong side of the avenue, as though after him. But the bullets were for me. I had sense enough to dive for the street and get behind the car. Didn't see anything but a sub-caliber gun. Didn't get the license number, and the car got away. The waiter at Tay's place held me up a long time on change. They probably had the car somewhere nearby and the hold-up gave them time to get set. I told the cops that I thought the men in the car were after the other guy."

Julie got a pencil between even, white teeth and chewed on the wood.

"I don't like having the agency

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mixed up with Tay," she said finally.

I smiled grimly. "We can send him back the 600 and promise not to tell anyone what we know."

Julie said: "Don't be silly. We're *in* it now. We've been mixed up with things we haven't liked before this."

"It's all right," I said thoughtfully, "so long as the old lady or Nancy Gale don't get the idea that we might be able to help—"

The phone box from the reception room made buzz sound. I pressed a button and the Jones girl on the outside desk said, through the speaker:

"A Mrs. Sylvia Greenway wishes to see you, Mr. Davies. She states that it is extremely urgent."

I said: "In about five minutes I'll have her in. Please ask her to wait."

When I snapped the button on the phone box Julie stood up and swore.

"How about Mrs. Greenway?"

"You bring her in, Miss Ryan. Just show her to the door. I'll send for you when I need you."

Julie half-closed her dark eyes. "Before I become your steno again, Dee — if Mrs. Greenway has a job for us to do — we *take* the job."

I grinned. "Okay, Mr. Dancer," I replied. "And that's a swell shave you had this morning."

Julie swore at me and went away.

Sylvia Greenway was tall and thin. She had a sharp nose and dark eyes. She came into the room slowly, using a heavy cane. She was dressed in black, but not quaintly. Her hair was white. Near my desk she halted.

"Mr. Davies?" she said in a voice that was not quite steady enough.

"Yes, Mrs. Greenway," I replied. "Let me get a chair for you—"

"Don't trouble," she said sharply. "I have been in the habit for quite a few years of getting things for myself and can still do it."

I stood behind my desk until she reached a chair facing mine, seated herself.

"Your agency has been recommended to me. Never mind who recommended it. What I will tell you is confidential. Is that so?"

"Absolutely," I said.

She drew a deep breath. "I have reason to believe that my life is in danger. I wish to be protected as much as is possible. That does not mean that I want two or three of your operatives under my feet all the time. You understand?"

I said: "Perfectly, Mrs. Greenway." I toed out the dictograph drawer and rested one shoe on it. "You suspect some person, one person, of wishing to injure you?"

She regarded me with considerable contempt. "Well, I don't suspect all New York, Mr. Davies."

"Good," I said cheerfully. "That will make our defense simpler."

She narrowed her eyes on mine and made a sniffling sound.

"You are a drinking man, Mr. Davies?" she asked grimly.

I said: "Water and milkshakes, and now and then a glass of beer."

"Beer?" Her eyes widened and held an angry expression.

"You are probably familiar with

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The American Gardens, on 42nd Street, if you drink beer," she said coldly.

I nodded. "I prefer the place across the street," I replied casually. "*Trammer's.*"

"I own *Trammer's*," she said.

"Yes," I said simply. "I know."

"*How* do you know?" she demanded.

"You were tricked into leasing *The American Theatre* to a racketeer, through one of his men who posed as a theatrical man. The theatre was turned into a beer garden. There was no way you could prevent that, so you opened up another beer garden on property you owned, directly across the street. You called it *Trammer's*. A man named Trammer runs it for you. The object is to drive the racketeer across the street out of business. Then you will close up your *Trammer's*."

Mrs. Greenway drew a deep breath. "Goodness!" she murmured. "But how did you —"

I interrupted. "The racketeer came to this agency, knowing it was a reputable one and that you would believe reports submitted by us. He wanted your granddaughter, Miss Nancy Gale, followed."

Mrs. Greenway half rose from her chair. Then she sank back again.

"He wanted — Nancy — followed?"

I nodded. "He said she was gambling at a certain club, drinking — and in bad company. He said you loved her and that if he went to you with our reports and told you that if you didn't let him run *The American Gardens* without competition he would expose your granddaughter — he thought you would close *Trammer's*."

Mrs. Greenway said: "Well!" She leaned back in the chair and looked thoughtful.

"Well?" she said finally. "You followed Miss Gale?"

I said: "Yes."

Mrs. Greenway seemed very calm now. "I have not been told of any such reports."

I smiled. "This racketeer had stated that we could pick up Miss Gale at a certain club. I handled the matter personally. I didn't pick up Miss Gale. I *did* pick up some girl who resembled her very much and who used her name. It was a frame-up, so there were no reports."

Mrs. Greenway took her cane in her right hand and tapped the rug with it.

"I have said that my life is in danger — and that I want protection."

She stopped and after a little time I said: "You suspect a certain person?"

Mrs. Greenway battered the ferrule of her cane against the carpet.

"I do," she stated firmly. "I suspect my angelic granddaughter, Nancy Gale!"

Julie said: "What a set-up!"

"Rader is on the job now. He'll watch the old lady. She's in a spot."

Julie said: "*You're* in a spot, too."

I shrugged. "He's missed once. He'll be more careful the next time. The thing that beats me is —"

I stopped and fingered the retainer check that Mrs. Greenway had left on my desk. Julie said, irritated:

"Go on — don't play games."

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"I couldn't swallow Mrs. Greenway's idea of the reason Nancy Gale wants to kill her," I said slowly. "Nancy wants money — and the old lady won't give it to her. All right. But if Mrs. Greenway dies she won't get it, anyway. Because Nancy gets only $500 a month. The rest goes for crusading against whiskey and wine. So what does Nancy gain?"

Julie said, "Mrs. Greenway told you that she was hated because Nancy *knew* she was only going to get the $500 a month. How about revenge?"

I shrugged. "I hate to show disrespect to age. But I think Mrs. Greenway was lying. If she *does* fear her — and she acts as if she does — she has some reason that she won't tell us; so she gave us that hooey. But the point is, she fears Nancy Gale, fears for her life. We begin from there."

I stood up and looked at my wristwatch. It was after four. The private phone buzzed and I lifted the receiver.

Rader's voice came clearly over the wire. "Mrs. G. had her chauffeur drive her around Central Park for an hour or so. Then over to the Drive. I trailed in a cab. Then she went to the *Mary Ellen Tea Room* on 72nd Street, west. Had lunch. Then to her home."

I said: "The one that has the garage connecting? 68th, just east of Park?"

Rader said: "Right. She got there at about 1:15. She told me not to get under her feet, so I didn't crowd her. The car was driven into the garage, and after a while her chauffeur came out and said he was through for the day. He was off for the baseball game. He said Mrs. G. had gone into her house, by the garage entrance. She always does. Said she wouldn't be out until tomorrow — maybe not then."

"All right," I stated over the phone. "What of it?"

Rader's husky voice said: "At 3:10 a cab stopped at the corner of Park and 68th St. The Gale girl got out and paid up. She walked past the Greenway house a couple of times, and when things looked right went into the garage building. She's still out of sight."

I whistled softly. "Sure it was the Gale girl — Nancy Gale?" I asked. "You covered her while I was spotting the other one — the one Joey Tay *wanted* us to think was Nancy Gale. They look a lot alike, you know."

Rader said: "Yeah, but they don't walk alike. This was the real article."

I said: "How'd she get in the garage — double doors, aren't there?"

Rader said: "Yeah — double doors; they open out. But there's a single door at one side, and the chauffeur and footman have quarters upstairs. The chauffeur told me that. His name is Haney."

"Where was the footman when Haney headed for the ball game?" I asked.

Rader said: "He wasn't in the car today. His day off. He's over in Brooklyn. Got it from the chauffeur while Mrs. G. was having lunch."

"All right," I said. "How'd Nancy Gale get in the garage entrance — just open the door?"

Rader said: "I'd passed her once, to

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get a good look, and I was pretty far away when she went in. She seemed to just open the door and walk in. But a few minutes ago I tried the door. It was locked. So maybe she used a key."

I said: "Maybe. You stick near the place — and if she comes out — call the office. But don't tail the girl. Stay where you are."

Rader said: "Okay."

I hung up and told Julie what Rader had told me. She frowned.

"Why would Nancy Gale use the garage entrance to get into the Greenway house?" she asked slowly.

I smiled a little grimly. "We don't know that she *got* into the Greenway house," I said.

Reaching for the outside phone, I gave the switchboard girl a number. After a few seconds a voice said: "Hello."

I got my voice flat. "Howard Stevens, of White, Stevens and White," I said. "I have important news for Miss Gale."

The voice, which was feminine, said: "Just a minute, please."

I waited. Julie lighted a cigarette. The phone made clicking sound and a different voice said:

"This is Miss Gale — I think my maid failed to tell me the correct name —"

I said: "Good news, Edith — the court has decided —"

The voice cut in: "I am Miss Nancy Gale. "You have made a mistake."

I said: "Miss Nancy Gale? I'm terribly sorry. My secretary must have given me —"

There was more clicking sound. I hung up and frowned at Julie.

"Sounded like Nancy," I said. "I only heard her speak once or twice, when Rader and I were tailing her. But it sounded like her voice."

Julie pulled hard on her cigarette.

"What the devil?" she murmured. "Maybe Rader was fooled, and it was Joey Tay's girl that went into the garage."

I shook my head. "Rader and I have been close to the other one. We've been right beside her. Rader wasn't fooled."

Julie said: "All right. Then Nancy Gale went in the garage at 3:10 or a little after. It's just 4:20 now. Nancy left some other way, and got back to her apartment."

I shook my head. "Don't see it, Julie. What other way?"

Julie said impatiently: "We don't know anything about the rear of the house or the garage, or other ways she might get out without being seen."

I agreed with that. "I'd rather play with the idea that Nancy is still inside the garage somewhere, and that someone did a good job with her voice."

Julie pointed towards the phone. "Better call Sylvia Greenway."

I nodded and called. A maid answered; I gave my name and said it was necessary for me to speak to Mrs. Greenway. The maid said that Mrs. Greenway was sleeping. I said:

"Has she had any visitors since she returned from her drive?"

The maid hesitated and I said: "This is important. Answer the ques-

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tion or wake Mrs. Greenway and give her my name."

The maid said that Mrs. Greenway had received no visitors. She had retired immediately after arriving.

I said: "She couldn't have visitors without you knowing it?"

The maid was very certain. "No, sir — she could not."

"Fine," I told her. "Now wake Mrs. Greenway up, tell her Mr. Davies is calling and it is very important."

The maid started to protest and I spoke sharply and to the point. After about a minute Mrs. Greenway said irritably:

"What is it, Mr. Davies? I was sleeping."

"Sorry," I told her. "You haven't seen Miss Gale since you returned?"

Mrs. Greenway said: "Of course not!"

"Good." I watched Julie's narrowed, dark eyes. "You remember what Mr. Rader looks like?"

Mrs. Greenway snapped: "Of course."

I interrupted. "Rader is outside, somewhere near the house. Send someone out to tell Rader to come in and stay near you. But don't stay alone while you do it."

Mrs. Greenway's voice held sudden fear. "What is the matter — what has happened?"

"Nothing," I said quietly. "I'm coming up right away. I don't want you to be left alone until I get there. I want Rader inside and near you —"

Mrs. Greenway said in a high-pitched voice: "Nonsense!"

I spoke slowly. "When you talked to me this morning and said you were afraid of a certain woman — I was inclined to think there wasn't much reason for you to be afraid. Do you remember what you said to me?"

There was silence at the other end of the wire.

"You said," I told her, " 'a woman can kill. Men aren't the only killers.' "

Mrs. Greenway spoke rapidly, in a high-pitched voice.

"You are afraid that Nancy —"

I interrupted. "Send someone out for Rader. Tell that person what he looks like. Have someone stay with you. I'll be right up."

Mrs. Greenway said in a shaken voice: "Yes — yes — I will!"

I turned the key in the lock, at the side of the two-storied garage building. The door gave way and I went inside. According to Rader, who had left Mrs. Greenway locked in her room, this was the door Nancy Gale had entered. Rader followed me in. The small hallway was dark.

I found the light switch, snapped it. Stairs ran up from the hallway to the next floor, where the chauffeur and footman had rooms. To the right of the stairs was a door. Rader said:

"That's the door leading into the garage. Mrs. G. said the one leading into her house is halfway back in the garage, and on the left as you go back."

I gave the door on the right a shove, but it didn't move. When I pulled it towards me, it opened. There was dull light in the rear of the place as we

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walked past two cars, side by side.

"Door's on the left," Rader said.

Behind the two cars were barrels of gas and oil and a long work bench with some small machinery on it. I stopped and looked to the left when we were near the work bench. Rader said:

"God!"

The body was lying face downward. I went over close to it. The door leading into Mrs. Greenway's house was less than three feet from the head. A small, blue hat lay several feet from the body, battered out of shape. A blue hand-bag was close against the base of the door, which was closed.

Leaning down I turned the body over. Rader, standing close to me, muttered:

"Nancy Gale — all right!"

I said: "Nancy Gale — but not all right. Dead as hell!"

"Head smashed. Lot of blows."

I nodded. "Back of the head, top of the head — across the forehead. Probably got the first from behind and wasn't worried about any of the others."

I got a handkerchief around my right hand and picked up the bag.

I took the bag over to a clean spot on the work bench and opened it. It took five minutes to look over the contents, and the five minutes were wasted.

Lipstick, rouge, powder, small bills and change. Some criticisms of a concert of hers. Two handkerchiefs. A hunk of green jade in the shape of a monkey. A small tin of aspirin. A vial of some sort of perfume. That was all.

I got the contents back in the bag, put the bag where I'd found it.

"No good, eh?" Rader said.

I shook my head. "Poke around the dead lady a little," I ordered. "But don't move her any more than you have to."

I walked around the garage, looking at a lot of things pretty carefully. When I got back to Rader he was shaking his head.

"Sport dress, hat and gloves — gloves on, hat off. Nothing in the pockets but a blue handkerchief to match the blue of the dress. You went through the bag."

I nodded. "No key to the garage?"

Rader frowned. "If there is one — I missed it."

I shrugged. "Maybe the murderer didn't," I said. "I'll check up."

The check-up didn't do any good. I stood near the door leading to Mrs. Greenway's house. There was a knob on it, but no lock. I used a handkerchief again and turned the knob. Nothing happened.

Rader said: "Mrs. G. told you it was kept bolted on the inside."

I nodded. The next ten minutes were spent in looking over the garage for the second time. Nothing turned up. Rader and I stood near the body.

"You go to Mrs. Greenway and tell her about this," I said. "Then call the police. I'll keep in touch with you. Better stick around here. Your story to them is that the agency was hired to protect her. She can tell them what she was afraid of. You were tailing Mrs. Greenway; saw a woman enter

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here and called me. We came in and found Nancy Gale."

Rader said: "Okay. Do we forget about Joey Tay and McQuirter?"

I nodded. "And the fact that I called Nancy Gale at her apartment, after you called me and said she'd come in here — and someone who said she was Nancy answered the phone."

Rader said: "The hell you say!"

We went away from the body of Nancy Gale, towards the door that led from the garage to the hallway. At the foot of the stairs I stopped and looked towards the first floor.

Rader said: "Want to take a look up there?"

I shook my head. "The police can do that. If I'd known that Nancy was being smashed out I'd have told you to stay outside. I didn't know, so you went to the old lady. That left the murderer the chance to get out to the street, if that was what happened."

We went to the street and shut the door behind us. When I tried the door from the outside it was locked. I gave Rader the key.

"When you get to Mrs. Greenway, break the kill news to her gently, Rader. Remember, she's 80."

Rader said: "I got a hunch she can take it."

The doorman swung open an ornate door and I went into the foyer. A uniformed gentleman near a switchboard turned his head in my direction.

"Miss Nancy Gale. That's Apartment 1803, isn't it? The name is Davies and I'm expected."

The uniformed one nodded and plugged in. I walked over soft carpet, went into the nearest elevator and up to Apartment 1803.

I pressed the button and after about ten seconds the door was opened. The maid was in a quiet uniform. She had very large brown eyes and a fat face.

"Miss Gale among those present?" I asked cheerfully.

She shook her head. "No, sir."

I nodded. "I know."

I moved into the foyer of the apartment. The maid's large eyes grew larger.

"But Miss Gale is not —"

I nodded again. "I know that. What's your name?"

Her lips tightened. I stopped smiling. "Rather talk at the police station?"

"You're not the police," she said.

"I'm damn' near the police," I told her harshly. "And *you're* damn' near the police right now."

I kicked the door closed. She stood near a gray wall and watched me.

"Why did you play two parts a little while ago, when I phoned Miss Gale?" I said.

Fear showed in her eyes. I said: "Ever been mixed up in a murder?"

Her lips parted; she stared at me.

"You've got a good chance to be," I told her. "You tried to do Nancy Gale's voice over the phone. You did a fair job — your voice has something of the same quality. But Nancy Gale wasn't here when I called. That mixes you up in a murder."

She said tremulously: "A murder?"

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I nodded. "Why did you do the voice job?" I asked softly.

She took the back of her left hand away from her lips.

"She told me to," she said slowly. "She said Mr. Cummings might call — that's her fiancé. She wanted him to think that she was at home. I was just to say that she felt bad, couldn't see him. And then hang up."

I shook my head. "You're lying. I told you my name was Stevens. And still you played Nancy Gale."

She said: "I thought Mr. Cummings might be trying to —"

I smiled. "Trick Nancy Gale?"

She nodded. "That's the truth — the whole truth," she said.

There was a brief silence. "All right — I think that's straight," I said. "She was playing games with him, eh? And he suspected her?"

She just stared at me. I said gently: "Where was Miss Gale going, when she left here?"

She shook her head. "I don't know — I never knew where she went. I'm just — her maid."

I said: "Well, you're not her maid any more. She's dead. Murdered."

She shut her eyes and lowered her head.

"Show me the telephone," I said.

She opened her eyes and looked stupidly at me. After a short time she turned and went along a hall.

Near the living-room she stepped aside. I stopped and said:

"You sit near the phone. It won't hurt for you to hear what I say."

She sank down on a divan and covered her fat face with her hands. I called Mrs. Greenway's house.

A voice said: "Yeah — hello!"

"Calling Mr. Rader," I stated. "Is he around?"

The voice said: "Yeah — there's a lot of us around."

I cut in. "Get me Rader, will you? It's Dion Davies talking."

The voice said: "Say — I figured that out. This is Delahenty."

"I figured *that* out, too," I told him. "*Sergeant* Delahenty, isn't it?"

He chuckled. "They haven't busted me yet. Say — you got an inside on this job, Davies?"

I said: "Sure — I was sitting in one of the cars when she was knifed."

Delahenty swore. "The knife must have had a solid handle," he said. "Here's Rader —"

Rader spoke tonelessly. "Rader."

"Can anyone hear you talk?" I asked.

"No. Booth — sound-proof."

"Anything turn up, besides the police?"

Rader said: "Yeah — things are popping. That tough lieutenant, Fendler, came along. He found something."

"What did he find?" I asked.

"An extra cane of the old lady's. Bloodstained, with some hair on it. No fingerprints. He found it inside the house, on the other side of the door leading in from the garage."

I thought that over. It was something I hadn't expected. Rader said:

"You still on?"

"Yeah," I replied. "Still on. Is Fendler going at Mrs. Greenway?"

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Rader swore. "Sure, but carefully. She's seen what he's getting at and already has called him a damn' fool."

"What's *her* story on the cane?" I asked. "How'd the murderer get it?"

Rader said: "She says she hasn't used the cane in months. It was in a closet on the street floor, the last she knew about it. Someone gave it to her as a present, but it was too heavy. She put it in the closet herself."

I said: "What's Fendler's idea of a motive?"

"Seems to think the old lady knew her granddaughter hated her. Sent for her, trapped her and killed her. Murder because of fear. Didn't think she'd be suspected if Nancy was killed in the garage. And her age, too — figured that would get her off. Fendler hasn't said that, but his mind seems to be working that way."

I thought that over. "How's *your* mind working?"

Rader swore. "The cane was the weapon. The murderer wore gloves. The murderer got inside the house, even though the servants swear the inner bolt was shot. The servants seem to be all right — three of them. I can't figure Mrs. G. She's a strong woman, physically and mentally, for her age. And she was afraid of Nancy."

I said: "All right — stick around and keep your eyes open. I'll call you."

Hanging up, I looked at the maid. "What's your name — I asked that once before."

"Bunter, Norah Bunter."

"Nice name," I told her. "Even for a liar."

She sat up straight, and there was rage in her brown eyes.

"You're taking this pretty hard — considering how little you know about it," I said slowly.

She was breathing quickly. "I was Miss Gale's — maid — for two years —"

"Sure," I agreed. "It's a shock." I went over close to her and looked down at her. "Why did Nancy Gale go to Sylvia Greenway's house this afternoon?"

Her eyes held a sullen expression. "I didn't know she went to Mrs. Greenway's house," she said in the same dull voice. "All I knew was —"

She checked herself, shook her head. I went to the divan and sat down.

"Go ahead," I advised. "It's easier to tell me than to tell the police. I'm a sentimental guy."

She made a little gesture.

"I knew that she hated Mrs. Greenway. And yet — she was afraid of Mrs. Greenway. She said her grandmother was a hard, strong woman."

"Many women are hard and strong," I said. "Why was she afraid of Mrs. Greenway?"

Norah Bunter pressed her lips tightly together. I waited.

"I don't know," she said finally. "But she was afraid of her. She did what Mrs. Greenway made her do."

I nodded. "What did Mrs. Greenway make her do?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I don't know. But she sent for Miss Gale often. She made her sneak into the house — she couldn't use the main entrance. She

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ıad to go in through the garage. Miss Gale would come back hating her."

"You wouldn't be fooling me, vould you?" I asked.

She stared blankly at me. I went to he phone and called the office. When got Julie I said:

"Any news from Mr. Dancer?"

Julie said: "A wiré from Chicago—"

I said: "So? Well, I'm in Miss Gale's partment." I gave her the address nd apartment number. "I've been alking with the maid, Norah Bunter, he one who played she was Miss Gale, ver the phone. I'm going to talk with er some more. She had her orders rom someone, and I don't need two uesses on that. Perhaps if I stick round, they may show — for a heck-up, and I'll get a story. I'm laying it that way. I wanted you to now in case you had to reach me."

Julie's voice sounded hard. "Very vell, Mr. Davies."

I called the Greenway house again, ot a dumb dick and then Rader.

"Anything new?" I asked.

Rader said that Lieutenant Fendler vas still battering away at Mrs. Greenvay. He believed she'd killed her randdaughter in the garage and then ad come into the house and had een careless about the cane. She had icked a time when her footman was ff duty and her chauffeur was at the all game. One of the other servants vas away, too. Fendler hadn't got the notive yet, but thought it had something to do with money.

I said: "When he says that Mrs. G. vas *careless* with her cane it's a beautiful understatement. Apparently she left it around for anyone to pick up."

Rader said: "Mrs. G. hasn't mentioned Joey Tay or McQuirter, or the beer business. Not yet. She's sitting up and snapping back at Fendler."

I said: "Pretty good for 80, eh? Well, stick around."

Hanging up, I turned towards Norah Bunter.

"Who do *you* think murdered Miss Gale?" I asked softly.

She shivered. "I don't — know."

"You know something you're not telling me. That puts you in a bad spot. A very bad spot. The police think Sylvia Greenway murdered Miss Gale."

She shook her head slowly. "I don't know," she said. "All I know is that Miss Gale was afraid of her."

I said: "You think Mrs. Greenway killed your mistress, Norah?"

Her eyes flashed anger. "Don't call me Norah!" she snapped.

"Several pardons," I said. "Isn't your name Norah? You can call me Dion, or Dee, if you wish."

Her eyes were narrowed, sullen. I spoke in a soft voice.

"Nancy Gale was afraid of Sylvia Greenway. Mrs. Greenway is a hard, strong woman. She made Nancy do things she didn't want to do. Made her sneak into her house through the garage. Nancy would return here hating her grandmother. You've *said* those things."

Norah Bunter said dully: "Yes —"

I nodded. "You've *suggested* that the murdered woman's fiancé suspect-

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ed her of being something-or-other — and Nancy knew that. So when he tried to trick her, Nancy had you try to trick him."

She looked at me with narrowed gray eyes, but did not speak.

I said: "You wouldn't keep anything back from me, would you? Nothing that might get you a stretch of years in jail?"

"I've told you all I know," she said.

"Fine," I said. "And just to show you that I appreciate your frankness — I'll tell you all *I* know."

She opened her eyes, and her fingers moved nervously.

"Once upon a time," I told her pleasantly, "there was a racketeer by the name of Joey Tay. He had —"

I checked myself as her eyes stared past me, towards the entrance of the living-room. I didn't turn. My right hand slid downward until a voice said:

"Never mind the gestures, Davies! Keep those hands up!"

The voice was very low and very hard. I stood perfectly still. Norah Bunter leaned back again, closed her eyes and drew a deep breath. She said bitterly:

"I wish to God I was dead!"

"You may get the wish, at that," I told Norah Bunter. "They hanged a woman out West, not so long ago — and if the law can hang them it can burn them."

She swayed to her feet and called shrilly: "No — no —"

Another voice behind me said: "Shut up — and sit down!"

Norah Bunter turned sidewise and half fell on the divan.

I said: "Don't be rough with her, McQuirter."

When I turned around, McQuirter was standing just inside the living-room. Both hands were in pockets of his suit coat.

Five feet nearer me, and slightly to the left of McQuirter, stood Joey Tay. He was wearing a close-fitting blue serge suit and there was a white flower in a buttonhole. His small, dark eyes were on mine — his right hand was buried in the right pocket of his blue serge suit coat. He was medium in size, smooth-shaven and pale. His very new soft hat was turned down in front.

I said: "Hello, Joey."

His voice was cold but easy. "Hello, Davies. Social call?"

I shook my head. "My partner and I talked things over and he thought I'd better drop in on Miss Bunter."

Tay said: "Yeah? I thought Dancer was out of town."

I nodded. "He is. But the town he's in has a telephone."

Tay said: "So? Must be a big town."

"Chicago," I replied. "They've been trying to get a phone for a long time. I think it's a good thing."

McQuirter said harshly: "Who the hell cares *what* you think, Davies?"

I made clicking sound. "Mr. McQuirter! Is that nice?"

McQuirter jerked an automatic from his right pocket. He held it low and moved the muzzle slightly.

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"Is *that* nice, Davies?" he said huskily.

Tay looked at McQuirter without moving his head.

"Put the water pistol away, Mac," he ordered quietly. "If there's any killing to be done around here — *I'll* do it."

McQuirter shrugged. "Okay," he said, and got his gun out of sight.

I looked at Joey Tay's buried right hand, then at his eyes. Tay smiled just a little, and his smile wasn't too pleasant. He tilted not much of a chin in the direction of Norah Bunter.

"Trying to get something out of her, Davies?"

I said: "Yeah — a girl by the name of Nancy Gale was murdered this afternoon. Maybe you've heard of her."

Tay smiled so that his teeth showed, but his eyes were hard.

"The name sounds familiar," he said calmly.

I nodded. "When you walk into her apartment the way you did just now — I should think it would."

Tay nodded very slowly. "Did Norah tell you anything that helped, Davies?" he asked in the same easy tone.

I said: "Yes — and no."

Norah Bunter pulled herself up, turned wide eyes towards Joey Tay.

"No — I haven't said —"

Tay moved his right hand upward from the pocket. Norah Bunter was on her feet, facing him. She took a step towards him and sank to her knees.

"Joey — Joey!"

Her voice was pleading. The gun hand jerked and a Maxim-silencer that only half worked gave a loud popping sound. Norah Bunter gasped: "Joey — I didn't —"

Her body slipped downward, crumpled on the rug near the divan. I stood very still, looking down at her. After the fall she didn't move much.

Tay said softly: "Take a look, Mac."

McQuirter went past me and bent over the crumpled figure. When he straightened up he said:

"That did it, Joey — she's through."

I kept on standing still. Joey Tay said: "Damned if I thought Norah would suicide this way."

He looked down at the body, shook his head slowly from side to side.

McQuirter said huskily: "She was in a tough spot, Joey — I guess it was the only way out."

I stood very still and kept very quiet.

Tay said: "Sit down on the sofa, there, Davies. See that cigarette box? Pick it up and put it down again. Lift that decanter, and use your fingers."

I did as I was told. "How about pressing my fingertips on the wood of the table?" I asked. "It'll take a good print."

Tay smiled grimly. "We don't want to overdo things. Now sit back and listen." He turned to McQuirter, who was standing behind him again.

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'Keep your hands off everything, Mac — and we go out the way we came in — the service entrance, all the way down. Handkerchiefs on the knobs again."

McQuirter nodded. Tay handed him the gun he'd used on Norah Bunter.

"Fix it so it'll be sure to go off again," he ordered. "I'll talk fast, Davies. It happened like this — you suspected her of the murder of Nancy Gale. You came up and gave her the works. She shot you and suicided. The gun will be in her hand, and the silencer won't count, one way or the other. Simple, eh?"

I said: "Very. Only how will the police know I suspected her of the murder of Nancy Gale?"

Tay said: "They won't *know* it — but they'll figure it that way. You discovered the body, and you came here."

I said: "Joey — you're getting old. They'll figure I came here to *question* the maid. They won't figure I suspected her."

Tay shrugged. "When they look over her suicide and your kill — they'll figure you got something on her."

I said: "Good — that will let Mrs. Greenway out."

Tay narrowed his eyes. "That'll depend," he said coldly. "It'll depend on just one thing."

I leaned back on the divan and nodded my head.

"Joey," I said quietly, "did you have to murder Nancy Gale to frame the old lady? If you'd knocked off Mrs. Greenway — wouldn't that have closed up the beer garden across 42nd Street, and let you clean up?"

He shook his head. "I don't know how she has things fixed, after her death," he said slowly. "I'd rather see her live and *order* it closed up."

I nodded. "Norah Bunter's dead. I'll be dead. Then you get after Mrs. Greenway. You can fix it so that the police know the truth, if Mrs. Greenway closes up her spot across the street from *The American Gardens*. But if she *doesn't* close it up —"

"We'll just fix it so things look tougher for the old lady," Tay said softly.

I watched McQuirter fiddling with the gun. Tay said:

"You had a chance, Davies. There was money in it for you. You wouldn't give us reports."

I shook my head. "You slipped on that. The reports wouldn't have done you any good. Mrs. Greenway would have laughed at you. She didn't give a damn about Nancy Gale. She was afraid of her."

McQuirter stopped fooling with the gun and looked sharply at me. Tay said: "Oh, yeah?"

I nodded. "A woman can kill," I said slowly. "That was in the old lady's mind."

Tay ran left-hand fingers across his forehead. He smiled with his lips.

"You put yourself in a spot, Davies. You didn't go through with us. Then the old lady went to you, and you played in with her."

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"Sure," I said. "And then you had to work fast, before things got away from you."

McQuirter spoke anxiously: "Listen, Boss — he's talking a lot, and —"

"And that doesn't matter," Tay said in a hard voice. "He's having his final chat."

I said: "Norah Bunter called you Joey, before you shot her out, Tay. She fed me a wild story about Nancy being afraid of her grandmother. That was the bunk. Nancy was only afraid of one thing."

Tay said: "What?"

I looked at his narrowed eyes. "You," I told him. "She was playing nasty with her fiancé, because you were more interesting, because you could take her places on the quiet and show her things. A nice girl falling for a big-shot racketeer. That's happened before. And you put Norah Bunter in as her maid. Right?"

Tay smiled coldly: "You were a pretty good dick at that, Davies."

"Thanks," I said. "It wasn't hard to figure. You'd been seen once or twice. One of my boys got some underground stuff. And when you tried to frame Nancy by having us trail that other girl — you did a fair job. The reason you did so good a job was because you *knew* Nancy pretty well. And you had to have help on the inside. Norah Bunter tipped you when you could safely produce your imitation Nancy Gale for us. That was when the real Nancy was not going to be moving around town."

Tay said: "Well, well!"

I nodded. "You had to fake a Nancy Gale for us, Tay," I said, "because the real Nancy Gale had got wise to you. She was afraid of you, but she knew what you were trying to do. You were afraid she'd take it to the old lady, and with her information Mrs. Greenway could wind you up quick. Perhaps you had some other reason — enough to make you want to kill. You had Nancy stopped, and in a way that you could still play against Mrs. Greenway."

Tay moved his buried right hand slightly in the right pocket of the blue serge suit.

"How did Norah murder Nancy Gale?" he asked in a peculiar tone. "With the old lady's cane? How did she get into the garage? How did she get out?"

I forced a smile.

Tay said: "You've been pretty bright up to this point. Dancer and Davies, Ltd. A tough agency. How'd Norah do the job on Nancy Gale, Davies?"

I shook my head. "I haven't the slightest idea," I said. "I don't know *why* Nancy Gale went in the garage entrance. I don't know *how* Norah Bunter got the cane, or how she got away. I don't *know* that Norah Bunter was the murderer. But I do know that she faked Nancy Gale's voice on the phone, after Nancy was dead. That was the tip-off. She faked, thinking it would make things tougher, hold back the discovery

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of the body. It wasn't sense, but she was getting panicky. And she was losing her nerve, when I talked to her. She *felt* I suspected her, when I really didn't. I was trying to get at the murderer through her. Trying to frighten her by making her think *she* was suspected. And suddenly I realized her fear was deep — and that *she* was —"

Tay said: "Gun all right, Mac?"

McQuirter's voice was husky. "Yeah."

He handed it to Tay. Looking at me, Tay took his right hand from the coat pocket and held the Maxim-silenced gun in it. His face was expressionless.

"In a way — you were a good guy, Davies. You had a lot of things right." He broke off, spoke to McQuirter without taking his eyes from mine. "Get a handkerchief ready — so I can wipe off this gun before we squeeze it into Norah's fingers."

McQuirter said: "Yeah — and remember she was left-handed."

Tay swore tonelessly. "I remembered that when I gave her the dose. The coroner'll say she could suicide the way things are."

He looked at me again, with eyes almost closed.

"It's the hour for kiddies, on the radio, Davies — so *I'll* end up tonight's story before I sign you off."

I tried to get a smile going, but it didn't work. Tay said very softly:

"Norah Bunter got the old lady's cane — a few days ago. She went over with a note from Nancy Gale to Mrs. Greenway. The closet door, downstairs, was open. Norah got the cane under her coat. One of the boys worked a couple of nights and had some keys made for the garage lock. It wasn't much of a job."

McQuirter was looking at the body of Norah Bunter. Tay kept his eyes on mine.

"Today Norah went to the garage with the cane — while the old lady was out driving. She hid in the cellar until the car came in and the chauffeur cleared out. Then she used the garage phone and called Nancy Gale. She said her sister was ill — she'd been called away. And that the old lady had telephoned that she wanted Miss Gale to come to the house immediately, entering by the garage. She was in trouble. Nancy had gone into the house through the garage before and naturally she had the key to that side door.

Tay shrugged. "Nancy Gale went to the garage — and Norah used the cane. I promised her ten grand, or a lot of trouble if she didn't do the job."

I said shakily: "She did the job — but she got the trouble."

Tay spoke very quietly. "You were close to her, getting to her."

I tried to keep my voice steady. "The cane was found inside the house — and the door was bolted on the inside."

Tay smiled just a little. "I had one of the boys inside the house, reading meters. He went in just as the old lady came in from her drive, and

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stalled around, fixing a couple of them. He unbolted the garage door — the one leading to the house. After Norah did the job she took her time, went into the house and dropped the cane, shoved the bolt back and left by the servants' entrance of the house."

I said: "Maybe the police will think about the meter reader — and look him up."

Tay shrugged. "He's riding out of town right now, and he hasn't got a record. Norah's dead — a suicide after she shot you dead. The police may worry about that — but the old lady's on the spot. She was afraid of Nancy, because Nancy always needed money and the old lady didn't give it to her. And there's the blood-stained cane."

I said: "You may win — if Mrs. Greenway gets scared and thinks you can help her out of a jam. She may let you clean up on 42nd Street —"

Tay's voice was hard. "Stand up, Davies! Over there beside Norah."

I stood up and he lifted his right hand. There was a sharp crack from somewhere beyond him. Tay dropped the gun and went down. McQuirter swore and swung around. I started to dive for McQuirter, and heard Julie say:

"Hands out from your sides, McQuirter!"

I straightened, picked up the silenced gun from the floor and got the other gun from Tay's pocket. Then I went over to McQuirter and got his one gun.

Julie said: "I had to shoot, Dee."

I said: "You certainly did." I went over and looked at Joey Tay. Julie's bullet had got him low under the heart. His eyes hated me, but he didn't speak.

Julie said: "Did he get you, Dee?"

"You didn't give him time," I said. "Call an ambulance."

Julie called an ambulance.

"Hear the kiddies' hour story?" I asked.

Julie said: "Most of it. I got to thinking and decided I'd better come up the way they did — service elevator. They'd left the servants' door conveniently unlocked, and I've been waiting to hear their story. I waited almost too long, and had to shoot."

I brushed sweat off my forehead. "Wish I'd known you were there," I said. "Now call the police."

While she was doing it I said to Tay: "You'll sell that beer garden lease cheap now, won't you? Need the money for defense, eh?"

Tay said thinly: "I won't — have — to worry."

McQuirter swore hoarsely.

"Any calls while I was away, Miss Ryan?" I asked Julie.

She grinned. "Mr. Dancer — called — from Chicago —"

I put the hand that didn't hold a gun on her shoulder.

"Well, he'll be glad to learn you saved his partner for him," I said.

Julie's eyes were very dark and very hard to read.

"Yes," she said very slowly, "I expect — he will."

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A NIGHT AT THE THEATER

by BEN RAY REDMAN

I CAN'T PRETEND TO EXPLAIN HOW IT happened, but I can swear that I saw it happen — just two weeks ago this evening, beginning at exactly 9 P.M. Since then I have talked to scientists and television engineers, telling them something of the story, and those who didn't laugh in disbelief could do no better than to remind me of the old theory that no light-wave ever ceases and no sound-wave ever dies. Perhaps they should not be asked to do better, perhaps that is explanation enough. In any case, this is what happened:

It was, as I have said, exactly two weeks ago this evening. I was alone in the house because my wife was on night duty at the local filter-board center, where she is working in connection with the national air-defense program. I had eaten a cold supper and was planning to get into bed early and read myself to sleep. But before doing that I decided to watch a half-hour television program that promised to be better than average. I did watch it, sitting in a comfortable chair, with a drink that I could easily replenish on the table beside me, in a room that was completely dark except for the light from the television screen. And the program was really quite good; at least, it seemed so with the help of the drinks. When it was finished I got up to turn off the set — but before I could reach the dial I saw something on the screen that didn't look like a closing commercial. Nor did it sound like one.

What I could see and hear was a play that was already in progress. Judging by the costumes of the man and woman who were on the stage, of which the television camera was giving me a close view, it was a costume piece, and, judging by the accents of the actors, it was an English comedy. In fact, the man was obviously an Englishman of the Lord Dundreary type. At that precise moment he was cackling, "Ha! ha! ha!" In the face of this highly intelligent utterance his pretty companion asked: "What's the matter?" And he replied: "That wath a joke, that wath."

As he spoke these words, the camera — or probably one of a battery of cameras — cut from the stage to what looked like a real audience in a real theatre. I barely had time to calculate that the theatre probably held a thousand people, and to note with surprise that all the spectators seemed to be dressed for a costume party, when the entire audience rose to its feet and began to applaud vigorously, with a few cheers sounding above the handclapping. But the faces were not turned towards the stage. They were turned toward the rear of the theatre.

To the back of the theatre the television camera took me, and I saw that

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the cause of the demonstration was a party of four persons who had just arrived. Two men and two women were in the party. The younger man was wearing an old-fashioned uniform of an American army officer, with what I managed to recognize as a major's epaulets. He had thick hair, a high forehead, heavy sideburns, and a military mustache, and he looked as if he might be in his late twenties. The younger woman had a rather plain but intelligent face, and I noticed that she was wearing a heavy, elaborate necklace. The older woman was a plump, apparently placid middle-aged person, in an evening dress that revealed her full, smooth shoulders and short, fat arms. There were — rather coquettishly, I thought — flowers in her hair.

But it was the fourth member of the party, the second and older man, who instantly caught my eye and held it fascinated. He was tall and gaunt and stooped and homely. There were deep furrows in his lean cheeks, and his great eyes looked as if they had brooded over all the sorrows of mankind. His hair was shaggy, his upper lip clean-shaven, his beard close-cropped. He was wearing a dark suit, with a black tie folded across the front of his white shirt.

While I stared at him in amazement, the party of four began to move, guided by an usher and another man, a nondescript fellow — possibly some sort of attendant — bringing up the rear. The camera followed the group, and so did I.

I watched them go up a short stairway, pass through what I took to be a side aisle of the dress circle, go through a door into a narrow hallway, and from the hallway enter a stage box. (To be completely accurate, they did not all enter the box. The nondescript man stopped outside the door that led into the hallway.) The young officer and the young woman took the seats nearest the front of the box. The older woman chose to sit a little farther back. The older man lowered himself into a large rocking-chair that was placed in the rear of the box. From this comfortable position he could see the stage, but only a small portion of the audience — and only a few of the audience could see him.

As soon as the party was seated, the camera panned over the audience, showing their glances upturned towards the box, and their momentary indifference to what was happening on the stage. And then the camera swung round again to move in on the box from the audience's point of view. I saw that the double box in which the party of four sat was decorated with draped Union flags, and I saw that the flags framed a picture of George Washington. But I did not need this view to tell me what I was watching or where I was. I had known for some time. I was, by the grace of my television screen, in Ford's Opera House, on Tenth Street, between E Street and F Street, in the city of Washington, D. C. — and the time was the night of April 14, 1865.

I was also sitting in an armchair in

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the living-room of my own house, and I had a drink in my hand. But I had no idea of how I had got back to my chair, after being checked in the act of switching off the TV set, or of when I had mixed the new drink.

Moment followed moment now, with relentless fatality, as I watched the great drama unroll, while the little play upon the stage claimed, from time to time, my fleeting attention. The television cameras gave me complete freedom of vision. They enabled me to study the President's worn, kindly face in all the intimacy of a close-up. They made it possible for me to sit beside the President's wife, and to marvel that so placid an exterior could conceal the mad jealousies that I knew were there. I looked with interest at the young officer whom I now remembered to be Major Henry Reed Rathbone, attached to the War Office. I even managed to work up some interest in his fiancée, Miss Clara Harris, who previously had been only a printed name to me. She was not my type, but I found her pleasant enough.

From the TV screen came the voice of the actor who was playing the absurdly exaggerated role of "Our American Cousin" — and adding exaggerations of his own to the written part. Through the camera's eye I could see the peephole that had been bored, only that afternoon, in the door of the President's box; and I could see the wooden bar that had been so placed that the door from the dress circle into the little hallway could be barricaded from within. Through the camera's eye I could see the nondescript man — now known to me as John F. Parker, bodyguard — desert his post by that same door, desert the man in the big rocking-chair, and stroll downstairs and out into the street in search of a drink.

The scenes came and went, on stage and off. My tension grew. I looked at the luminous dial of my wrist watch. It was 10 o'clock. I realized that the second scene of the third act was drawing to a close. I sat there as if hypnotized, but at the same time with a passionate feeling that I should be able to do something. After all, I thought wildly, I was the only person present — the only person in Ford's Opera House — who knew what was about to happen. Surely there must be some way for me to stop it, some way for me to give a warning in time!

Then, suddenly, I saw what I had been waiting for. I saw the dark, slim man, with the black mustache, with the actor's face and the actor's walk, stroll into the theatre. For a moment the camera brought me so close to him that I fancied I could smell the liquor that I knew he had been drinking. I followed him as he climbed the stairs to the dress circle. I followed him as he went through the unguarded door — the door that should have been guarded — into the little hallway. I saw him put the wooden bar in place, securing himself against surprise from without. I stood at his side — and thought I could hear the beating of his heart — as he looked

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through the peephole at the President. And then I saw him take out the little brass derringer and hold it in his right hand, take out the steel dagger and clutch it in his left hand, silently open the door, and enter the box: I watched him as he paused for at least two full seconds — and let me assure you that two seconds can be a long, long time. The seconds passed. He pointed the pistol. I saw the flash and I heard the shot. And I saw the shot go home.

After that all was confusion and uproar. Rathbone sprang at the assassin, grappled with him, and was stabbed in the arm. Waving his dagger, the slim dark man with the actor's face — flushed now with drink and hate and triumph — jumped onto the railing of the box and leaped from it to the stage, catching his spur in one of the flags as he leaped, and landing with a leg crumpled under him. Loud above the uproar, the cries of the President's wife were horrible to hear. The man with the dagger struggled to his feet. Hands clutched to hold him, but he evaded them all — and just before he vanished in the wings he paused dramatically, flourished his dagger aloft, and shouted three words defiantly. Men swarmed onto the stage. One man, yelling that he was a surgeon, climbed from the stage into the Presidential box. The President's wife had to be pulled away forcibly from the slumped figure of her husband. The surgeon leaned above the President. And then —

Then the television screen went dark.

It stayed dark, because — as I learned later — it had blown out all its tubes simultaneously. And I stayed in my chair, motionless in the blackness, marveling at what I had seen. But most marvelous of all, most unbelievable, was what I had seen during those two long seconds when the man with the derringer and the dagger had paused. I had seen something then that is not in any of the history books.

Even now, in this year of 1953, I am not sure whether or not it would be right for me to make public what I saw. I have submitted that question, along with my story, to the highest governmental authorities; and I am still awaiting their decision.

But, in the meantime, I can tell you one thing. I can tell you, with all the certainty of an eye-witness, that it was not John Wilkes Booth who killed Abraham Lincoln.

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Black Mask *is now part of* **EQMM**

HEADS I WIN, TAILS YOU LOSE

by JOHN D. MACDONALD

IF A GOOD TAILOR COULD HAVE GOT hold of Hugo Stanwicz, he would have covered the great slabs of fat with a neat, loose-fitting gray suit in a quiet pattern. Then, when Hugo rolled through the lobby of the Edwinet Hotel on his way to make a soft buck, only the uninformed would stare. They might say to the man at the cigar counter: "Are they making a movie in here?"

And the man would answer: "Friend, that is Hugo Stanwicz and he will be glad to make you a small wager on anything you care to name — after he's checked the odds and bought insurance."

But Hugo didn't wear a quiet gray suit. He wore spectacular creations, padded in the shoulders, nipped in at the waist, flaring over the massive haunches. A surprisingly thin and exceedingly long nose, appearing to swing when he walked, bisected his vast and muddy face, giving Hugo the look of a happy and stunted elephant which had been taught during its formative years to walk on its back legs. His little gray eyes, imbedded in pads of doughy flesh, looked out at the world with vacant amiability. He carried, hidden away in his clothes, a silver coin the size of a small saucer. On one side was written, in tiny, rose-cut diamonds, the word, *Heads.* Under it was engraved *I win.* On the other side was an appropriate *Tails* and the mystic *You lose.*

It was the center and focus of Hugo's code. And it had made innumerable trips to Benjamin's Emporium — loans freely granted. The silver saucer was always good for $8.50 with Benjamin.

Hugo had learned, at an early age, that he was of a type unsuited to manual labor. Being an heir to nothing more than a lease on a railroad flat and a shovel caked with cement, living off his income appeared unfeasible. His way became clear at the time of the long-count Dempsey-Tunney fracas. A month before the bout, Hugo found a citizen who was willing to wager $5 even money on the outcome. In a fit of recklessness, Hugo bet on Dempsey. It troubled him, as it was most probable that he would not have the five to pay off should he lose — and the other party was a man with big hard fists. In the middle of a sleepless night Hugo grunted his way out of bed and made many figures on a piece of paper. At last he was able to sleep, and the next day he found an ardent Dempsey

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supporter and wagered $2 at three to one on Tunney.

After the fight Hugo collected his $6 from the Dempsey supporter and paid five of it to the Tunney supporter. He spent long hours with his fat white hand deep in his pocket, fingering the dollar profit. If the fight had gone the other way, he would have made $3 profit.

A great light dawned for Hugo: *it was possible for a man to bet without any possibility of loss!*

He never returned to the Brooklyn grocery store. He had the secret of permanent income without labor. True, it came much harder for Hugo to live with the profits of insured betting than it did for those persons, nimbler mentally and physically, who had been making a nice living for years at the same occupation. The tip of Hugo's tongue was permanently stained from sucking on the stub of a pencil, puffy brow knotted, while he strained at the simple mathematics of the racket.

But years lent a certain dexterity, and in time Hugo should have become an expert. He would have, but for one thing. Deep in his massive frame was hidden a small spark of gambling fever — an insidious little spark. Hugo, with cool and careful restraint, would accumulate a reasonable chunk of money, and then, feeling that he had inside information, would wager it without insurance on the outcome of anything from a dog race to the Kentucky Derby.

He lost oftener than he won. And then his heart hung in his breast like a soggy turnip fried in deep fat. He visited Benjamin . . . the saucer changed hands . . . and Hugo began again with very small stakes — insured.

He recognized this failing within himself and indulged in fits of morose self-reproach. But he kept on doing it again and again.

Now, as he walked through the lobby of the Edwinet Hotel, there was a tilt to his pearl-gray hat that would have been jaunty on another head. He had pyramided his insured winnings to an imposing level — and he was full of resolve never to make another uninsured bet.

Hugo turned sideways to squeeze through the narrow doors of the elevator, and the twisted melody of a popular song rumbled in his throat as he rode upwards to the third floor where Barney O'Gay made book in a converted suite.

He walked in, nodded to his myriad acquaintances — he had no friends. No man who plays the angles for a soft buck ever has friends. The world is full of faces and in the faces are sharp eyes — and behind the eyes are many plots, each of them calculated to impoverish all other men. Hugo didn't find this strange. He didn't know that any other attitude existed.

He walked heavily to the board and looked it over. Fights at the Garden. Basternick against Codey at even money. Hmmm. Codey's a colored boy. Odds ought to be different in Harlem. He made a mental note. And

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Chavat versus Antonelli. Six to five in favor of Chavat. There ought to be good Antonelli money in Brooklyn.

He located Barney and counted out $800 in the O'Gay paw. "Hole onta this, Barney. I'll phone in a hour."

Barney said: "Eight hunnert. Check. What's today's spread?"

Hugo smiled sadly and said: "Now, Barney, you know I can't tell ya until I get my dough down."

Hugo left and Barney sauntered over to his assistant, a small, frightened-looking man with the sad eyes of a kicked spaniel. Barney said: "That fat clown, that Hugo, he gives me 800 today. It's guys like him give honest bookies a black eye."

"What you going to do, Barney?"

He shrugged. "What can you do? When guys as dumb as him can bet it so they can't lose . . ." He left the sentence unfinished, and walked away.

Hugo had to hurry. This was the part of the business he didn't like. In fact, he had to run three steps to make the closing door of an uptown express. He sat on the wicker upholstery, patting his face dry with a big pale-green handkerchief. He walked from his stop to a cigar store in Harlem, nodding to the habitués as he went. There was no board in the back room, but one quick question gave the answer that Codey was being quoted as a seven to five favorite.

Hugo did some scribbling on the back of an envelope. It was a nice spread. He said: "May want some of that. Wait'll I phone." He squeezed into a booth and called Barney. "Codey and Basternick quoted even? They are? Put six hunnert of what I give you on Codey. I'll pick up the slip. Yeah. Thanks." He hung up, eased out of the booth, and bet 500 to 700 on Basternick.

He walked out, feeling very satisfied. If Codey should win, he'd lose 500 in Harlem and win 600 at Barney's. If Basternick should win, he'd win 700 in Harlem and lose 600 at Barney's. One hundred bucks in his pocket for sure.

He took a long subway ride out to Brooklyn and went to three places he knew before he found Chavat versus Antonelli at even money. He figured again, phoned Barney and told him to bet the 200 left on Antonelli at the short end of the six to five price. Then he bet 220 on Chavat at even money. If Chavat should win, he'd win 220 in Brooklyn and lose 200 at Barney's. If Antonelli should win, he'd lose 220 in Brooklyn and win 240 at Barney's. A sure twenty bucks either way.

His activities had taken a large slice out of the morning, but it meant a net of $120 so far for the day. He picked up his slips from Barney, ate a heavy lunch at a joint just off Times Square, and found a movie where a double bill, two horse operas, were showing. He sat in deep contentment, his stomach rumbling over the big meal, solmenly eating popcorn, and watching with wide, bland eyes as the hero fired 69 shots from a six-shooter without reloading. Westerns were Hugo's weakness.

While he sat, monolithic and con-

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tent munching his popcorn, a trio of extroverted citizens sat in their shirtsleeves in a plush apartment in the Sixties, drinking scotch, smoking dollar cigars, and planning a big push. There was Joe Banto, numbers king of a large eastern city, a flamboyant little swarthy man who talked with very little lip movement; Judson Gale, whose gambling ships anchored offshore had made many headlines, a plump little man with rosy cheeks, white hair, and scarred knuckles; Hillary Moyer, wan and ineffectual heir to a fortune once thought inexhaustible, but crippled by the large nibbles of six divorced wives.

Joe Banto said: "Now I'll run over it again lightly. The championship fight between Mole Anderson and Junior Gee is scheduled for three weeks from today. Time's getting short and we got to move fast. Moyer, you're putting up 500,000, same as Gale and me. That makes the syndicate capital a million and a half. Now, through the local contacts, I got a list of the soft dollar boys that'll farm out the bets for us. Mole Anderson is a five to one favorite. Our problem, boys, is to get 500,000 bet on Junior Gee so fast that we catch it all at the present rate. We got to have timing. Now, let's —"

Hillary Moyer said: "Why do we have to deal with these middlemen? Why can't the bet be placed all at once?"

"Shut up, dope," Banto said. "No one place could handle it, and by the time they farmed it out, the price would be wrong. I got ten dependable guys to place 50Gs apiece, and place it so fast in so many different places that we'll catch the low price. We can't do it ourselves. We'd be tipping the deal off. Besides, we don't want to attract the attention of the tax boys."

Judson Gale asked: "Where will that drive the price to?"

"My guess is five to three. Maybe five to four, but I don't think so. Then comes the gimmick. I bought me a guy with a sports column, and the week before the fight he's going to stick in some talk about Mole Anderson being way off his timing, getting a bad cut in training, and having a torn tendon in his wrist. That'll drive it to an even-money bet. Then is when we jump in with the million. We can't figure on placing it all at even money, but with the same technique we can maybe place half of it at even and the rest at five to four. Then, if Junior wins, we net a million and a half, deducting the million we bet on Mole from the two and a half million we clean if Junior wins. If Mole wins, we net about 400 grand. We can't lose either way. It's done all the time, but never this big before. In the meantime, I'll see if I can get Mole to dive for fifty thousand. It'll help, but we still win even if he crosses us."

"I'm afraid, gentlemen, that I don't follow all this," Hillary Moyer said.

"Shut up!" said Banto.

The three men unlocked the cases they had brought with them and the

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cash was counted. Judson Gale said: "It's only fair to tell you, Joe, I'll have a tail on you all the time. I trust you, you know, but it's just good business."

"Sure. Hell, it won't bother me," Banto said lightly.

Hillary Moyer looked wistful as his cash disappeared into Banto's suitcase. He hoped that the unpleasant little man knew what he was talking about.

Thus it was that three hours later Joe Banto sat in the office of a powerful New York citizen, interviewing the leg men who were to place the bets.

Hugo Stanwicz, having been intercepted in the lobby of the cheap hotel where he lived just as he was having pleasant thoughts of dinner, had been hustled into a waiting cab, pouting all the way down to the office of the powerful citizen.

He lost his pout when he saw who it was who had sent for him. The powerful citizen said: "Joe, this is Hugo Stanwicz. He makes his living in the odds business and gets around very quickly indeed for all his size."

Hugo nodded rapidly: "Yah."

Banto said: "O. K., Hugo. Here is 150,000 bucks. It is a lot of money and to help you watch it, I got a friend here named Doag. Doag, you go around with Hugo and you watch he doesn't get any reckless ideas. Hugo, you take the section East Fourteenth to East Fortieth, and starting tomorrow at 10 in the morning, you grab off 50,000 worth on Junior Gee to beat Mole Anderson. Don't take no less than five to one. Then you wait about a week and I'll get word to you through Doag here and tell you when to go to the same places and place 100,000 in small pieces on Mole Anderson. Get even money for all you can and no worse than five to four."

Hugo said: "From five to one down to even money!"

"That's right. And no funny business. You cross us up and I got another friend in town. A Chicago boy from the old days. You play it crosswise, and my friend, he puts a slug, which he rubs in garlic first, right in that fat middle of yours."

Hugo quivered as he had a very vivid mental picture of said slug breaking and entering. He opened his mouth to protest his innocence of any such move, but all he could utter was a faint chirping noise.

Banto smiled grimly and said: "Goodbye, Hugo, and don't lose the dough in the subway."

Hugo left, followed closely by the muscular citizen named Doag. Doag was a red-faced man in his early forties, with a look on his face as though he smelled dead mice in the woodwork. They went back to Hugo's room. Doag hauled the couch over in front of the door and went to sleep. He slept with his arms folded, his right hand resting on a Colt-shaped bulge near his left armpit.

Hugo slept poorly. In one dream he was running backwards down the

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street pursued by a large, leering bullet which followed him around corners and licked its chops in an alarming manner. He awoke and his disposition wasn't improved by the sight of the muscular shadow using the bathtub. A short, fat revolver gleamed blackly on the tile floor. Hugo stepped gingerly around it and brushed his teeth.

They ate a silent breakfast together. Hugo was acutely conscious of the sickening bulge of currency in his inside pocket. It weighed on his soul. He ate a meager breakfast of orange juice, fried eggs, sausage, waffles, toast, jam, and coffee.

At 10 sharp he stepped into Tiny Marlow's place on Fourteenth, sweat beading his gray expanse of brow. The board was up and the odds were Mole Anderson over Junior Gee — five to one. Tiny was behind the wicket, sucking up coffee with large uncouth noises. Hugo sidled up and waited until a horse man had wandered away. He said to Tiny: "How much Gee money can you soak up?"

Tiny looked at him with mild distaste as he set the cup down. "What you think this is, Hugo? Woolworth's, maybe? I can soak up any kind of dough you ever had in your pants. You name it."

"No, Tiny. You tell me, huh?"

"Hugo, name your bet."

"How about fifteen grand, Tiny?"

Tiny picked up the cup of coffee and got it almost to his lips. He paused and set it down. "Did you say fifteen grand?"

"Yah."

"Gimme a couple minutes on the phone, Hugo, and I'll handle all of it."

"No soap. I don't want you farming it. How much could you handle?"

"Let's say eight."

Hugo faced a wall and fumbled with the packet of money. He came back and slipped 8,000-dollar bills across the high counter. Tiny inspected each one carefully before he made out the slip. He said: "Kinda outa your class, ain't you, Hugo?"

Hugo gave him a large, damp, uncertain smile before he turned away and hurried out. The shadow detached itself from a wall and fell in step beside him.

Bellafleur took six; Rockanzo took eleven; Halloway took three; Empero took nine; Jackson took another eight; Muriel took the last five. And it was noon. Hugo assembled the slips with trembling fingers and pinned them together. Fifty thousand at five to one! A quarter of a million bucks if Junior Gee happened to win!

But it wasn't likely that the Fancy Dan, Mr. Gee, with lots of dance steps and a twenty-two caliber punch, could last the limit against the heavy artillery of Mole Anderson.

The shadow accompanied Hugo to a double feature — two westerns — but his presence and the bulge of the remaining hundred thousand turned the popcorn to ashes in Hugo's mouth and made it hard for him to follow the action on the screen.

In Hugo's simple philosophy it was only necessary for him to find the

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courage to finish the unsavory mission and be rid of his shadow. He felt no resentment about having been chosen. The world was full of people a little bit rougher than Hugo. In his own way, he sought self-effacement. He bore his affliction with the same stoicism with which he would have faced a common cold. He prayed that it would end soon.

But the ways of the acute little men who make their living on the fringes of society are devious indeed. The Very Powerful Citizen, having provided Joe Banto with a moderate amount of assistance, added some refinements of his own — added them with cunning and a deep appreciation of the value of a dollar. Even as Doag followed Hugo, another citizen followed both of them. He blended into the gray and neon of Manhattan the way a lizard finds invisibility on a rough wall. And he looked a bit like a lizard.

After two days of careful observation he made his report to the VPC. "All they got on the fat guy is this Doag, who is not very bright. Every day he follows the fat guy to a few horse rooms and then they both go to the movies. Cowboy movies. Fat boy spends a lot of time eating and a lot of time sleeping."

The VPC was following the odds closely and had noted that Mole Anderson had become but a five to four favorite. He knew that in a day or two Joe Banto would pass the word to Hugo to get the other hundred thousand down. And nine other men in the big town would also be slamming a hundred thousand apiece on Mole Anderson. But the VPC wasn't greedy. He had designs on only two of the ten — Hugo and another sharpie who seemed to be equally defenseless.

So the lizard listened attentively while the VPC gave detailed instructions. . . .

Hugo sat in the balcony of the fourth-rate movie house, his great jaws champing in a circular motion, grinding up the greasy bits of popcorn. He was beginning to enjoy the movies once more, having made an adjustment to the ever-present Mr. Doag and the uncomfortable bulge of currency in his inside coat pocket.

In the motion picture the blockhouse was on fire, and the desperadoes were worming their way up through the brush for a final charge at the brave defenders. The blonde was reloading six-guns for the hero. The desperadoes charged, and the picture house rattled with the crashing shots. Hugo didn't notice that someone behind them made a quick motion and Mr. Doag slumped down in his seat. The small crunching noise was unnoticed. Fragments of the mastoid bone slid into Mr. Doag's brain and perpetually stilled his rather vegetable-like reactions to his environment.

Nor did Hugo see, hear, or feel the blow which dropped him gently into unconsciousness. He didn't feel the hand that slid down inside his coat

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and removed the bulge that had bothered him for days. The lizard paused and looked back before walking casually down the stairway.

When Hugo awakened in the hospital he politely answered all the questions of the police. Yes, he knew Mr. Doag. Slightly. He had gone to the movies with Mr. Doag. Yes, he had been robbed. A little money had been taken. And a few betting slips. No, he didn't know who had done it. Very sorry.

Hugo struggled back into his clothes, gently fingered the lump behind his ear, and walked out of the hospital. A slender and ominous person urged him to get into a taxi which took him to a dingy and soundproof basement apartment near Sheridan Square. There he was quickly and expertly tied into a sturdy chair by two young men with the determined sadness of funeral directors. Hugo's mouth was as dry as West Texas and his fat palms had the texture of wet sponges. He felt unhappy.

He was left alone for an hour. At last a delegation arrived. It consisted of Joe Banto, Judson Gale, the Very Powerful Citizen, the lizard, and a new person called Charlie. Hugo formed an immediate dislike for Charlie, who had a wet, loose mouth, little hot eyes, and long thick fingers. He looked at Hugo with the same professional attention that a butcher gives to a side of beef.

Joe Banto stood in front of Hugo, his hands on his hips. "It won't work, fat boy."

Hugo said: "Hah?"

"Don't play stupid, you lump of suet. It was real neat. Doag gets his head smashed and you get a little tap on the head that maybe puts you to sleep and maybe doesn't. Who's holding the dough for you?"

Neither Hugo nor Joe Banto had any way of knowing that the lizard had not meant to kill. He had merely been hurrying to time the first blow with a blast of gunfire from the screen. With a sap, any undue haste geometrically increases the force of the blow.

So Hugo said: "Hah?"

Banto shrugged in disgust and the assembled group glared at Hugo. Banto turned and said: "Charlie, we'll all be back in the kitchen. You play with him for a little while and let us know when he decides to get talkative."

The kitchen door slammed shut. Charlie knelt and gently took the shoe and sock from Hugo's massive pink foot. Hugo's ankle was lashed to the leg of the chair. Charlie began to work with small tools and infinite delicacy on the fat foot.

Hugo bellowed once. From then on he screamed frankly. Charlie stopped and waited until the screaming ceased. Hugo's face was the color of unbaked pastry. Sweat rolled down it, soaking into his collar.

Charlie said: "How about it?"

Hugo gasped: "Don't . . . know . . . nothing."

Charlie bent over his work again. All the world, for Hugo, dissolved

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into a bright hot spark of pain that grew and grew and suddenly ceased. He came to when Charlie threw water in his face.

Charlie said: "You O.K.?" When Hugo nodded, Charlie sighed and said, "Well, let's go back to it," and bent over the foot again. The foot was beginning to lose resemblance to the other foot.

There was unbelievable pain and then the darkness. And again. Nature came slowly to Hugo's aid, deadening the ability of the nerves to transmit pain, turning the entire situation into a fantastic nightmare which lost all relationship to reality.

Hugo was vaguely conscious of Joe Banto standing in front of him once more. He heard Charlie saying, from a great distance: "Either the guy knows nothing, or he's got guts."

They all left him alone, and in the silent hours reality came back to him. And with it came a sort of dignity. The first dignity that Hugo Stanwicz had known in his vague life. He had been hurt, and with the hurt there had grown a slow anger. It was as massive and ponderous as Hugo himself. It filled his mind, and he forgot the throbbing pain of the nerves in his foot.

They all came back during the night. Banto looked tired. He said: "This is the payoff, Stanwicz. Tell me now or tomorrow they find you on your back in a Jersey swamp."

With his new dignity Hugo said: "I don't know nothing, and if I did, I'd never tell you guys."

The Very Powerful Citizen said to the lizard: "Untie him." The Very Powerful Citizen was happy. He was unsuspected, and he had personally added a very fine stack of bills to one of his safety deposit boxes. A very profitable situation.

Hugo sat heavily in the chair, his numb hands freed. He heard Banto say: "You two boys take him in the sedan. And get him away from the car. I don't want no blood on the upholstery."

Hugo thought: *It can't end this way. Always, in the movies, something happens. A hundred times I see it. Somebody comes in and sticks up the villains. Or the hero grabs a gun and blasts his way out. It can't end this way!* But while he thought, he could somehow see himself staring up at the dawn with sightless eyes, feel the rip of bullets through his big body.

Joe Banto disappeared into the bedroom and came out with a cheap .32 revolver. He handed it to Charlie, saying: "This'll do it. Toss it off the bridge on the way back." Charlie swung the cylinder open and inspected the brass ends of the cartridges. He snapped it back into place.

A gun is a strange gadget. Women have fired six shots at their husbands from a range of ten feet and missed with every shot. They tried to aim. Police courses in many cities emphasize the fact that in close work a gun should be aimed as naturally as one points a finger, with no conscious effort at aiming.

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Hugo had never fired a gun.

Hugo had seen hundreds of westerns, had seen hundreds of heroes grab a weapon and go bam, bam, bam — a villain dropping onto his face with each shot. Hugo thus believed a gun to be infallible.

Charlie made a mistake. He held the gun out toward Hugo and said: "Here, Fat Boy. Meet Mr. Bang."

Suddenly all the circumstances fitted. Hugo flashed his big paw out and grabbed the little gun. Joe Banto, Charlie, the lizard, Judson Gale, and the Very Powerful Citizen were in the room. Hugo turned the gun in his hand and the cheap little gun went whack, whack, whack, whack, whack.

If Hugo had ever fired a gun before, he would very probably have inflicted one bad chest wound, one arm wound, and three clean misses.

But to Hugo a gun was infallible, and he fired with all the negligent confidence of a later-day Tom Mix.

The Very Powerful Citizen caught the little slug flush in the mouth, and fell face down. Charlie backed to the wall and slid down, pawing at the hole in his chest; he slumped over and lay still. Judson Gale sighed and turned completely around before he fell; the round hole in his forehead bled hardly at all. The lizard tried to scream, but the rush of air that should have activated his vocal cords sped through the hole in his throat in a mist of blood; he went down heavily. Joe Banto smiled at Hugo, a smile that drew his lips back tightly against his teeth; his hand went slowly up toward a shoulder holster as the blood spread on his shirt and then he fell.

Hugo Stanwicz sat in the small silent room, breathing heavily. He thrust himself up to his feet, and forced his gashed foot into his sock and shoe. He then found the phone, dialed the number, and said: "This is Hugo Stanwicz. I've just killed five guys. You better come over." He gave the address and hung up.

With his new dignity, with his fat shoulders squared, he went back and sat down on the chair to await the arrival of the police. His anger was fading away and he looked at the bodies with mingled pride and horror, not realizing the strange effectiveness of his shooting, not knowing that dozens of men from Headquarters would stand by his chair and calculate angles and percentages, scratch their heads wearily, and try hard to believe that this man, who had never fired a gun, could do such a thing.

Hugo knew, in his vast simplicity, that it would be madness to try to run away from such a mass shooting. He had faith in the ways of westerns, where the court cleared the hero in a brief ceremony.

As he waited for the police, the bodies gradually ceased to be of very much importance to him. When he heard the sirens in the distance, he realized that he had been thinking about the current athletic contests in the big city, wondering where he could find a spread in odds big enough to make up for the few days' loss of income.

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EMERALD BAIT

by VAL DUNCAN

ONE LOOK FROM HER AND STORM signals began flying from Hatteras to the top button of my tuxedo vest. This girl meant trouble — beautiful trouble, but that was okay by me. Women like her and trouble are easy mixers, but you can wash 'em both out with a Martini.

But the Martini situation wasn't too good right now. There was one left on the tray and we both wanted it. She reached for it the same time I did. Our hands touched, our eyes met. Suddenly I needed a drink like never before.

"Sorry," I mumbled.

"So am I." Her voice was throaty and cool, and I knew she wasn't a bit sorry. Neither was I.

She moved with the grace of a panther — a panther in a shimmering gown that clung to her with loving care. She smiled and the most kissable mouth in my memory parted to show a row of white, even teeth. I could almost feel them nibbling at my ears. She lifted the glass.

"We both want it, so let's share it," she said. It was a fair proposition, I thought. *Anything* involving this baby would be a fair proposition.

She took my arm and we picked our way across the floor, all the time shoulder-deep in the Social Register. Most of the old dowagers had retired to the sidelines and more than one deb had passed out. Mrs. J. Chauncey Hadley was marrying off her last and homeliest daughter — no small achievement! — and it was a moment of rejoicing among the clan. Lots of Hadley cash was being spilled to spread this one.

We found a spot in a shadowy corner, not too far away from the center of things, and sipped the glass dry by turns.

"Having fun?" she wanted to know.

"Once in a while," I said. Despite the pleasant business at hand I was keeping my eye on Mrs. Hadley. For perhaps the hundredth time my gaze fastened on the big emerald that swung by a thin chain over her overstuffed frontispiece.

"Lovely, isn't it?"

"The party?"

The beautiful eyes gleamed. "That little number Mrs. Hadley is wearing, I mean." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "It's worth at least $100,000," she breathed.

I hoped she didn't see the way my eyebrows lifted. Maybe my little chum wasn't here for a purely social evening, either.

"Dance?" I said. She squeezed my hand for reply and we stepped out to the floor. The music was low and sweet.

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Maybe she liked to dance like that all the time or maybe it was just me, but she certainly loved close-quarter work. Somehow, I couldn't get around to telling her that all this was happening five years too late. She was my type, all right, but I wasn't toying around these days. My ever-loving wife saw to that. She's much too good a detective, almost psychic, and I know when I'm licked. So I just danced on, piloting my little chum through the crowd so I never lost sight of Mrs. Hadley's emerald.

Finally, we stopped dancing and stood in the shadow of some potted palms, just watching. The party was beginning to slow down. Most of those noble old backs were probably creaking by now and even the eyes without monocles were getting glassy. But not my eyes. They weren't missing a trick.

At the other end of the ballroom was a table freighted with silverware and other wedding presents, guarded by several bored but watchful guys who looked like they trained on rare beef. They were dicks from the Gloria Crawford Security Agency — boys to look out for. The silver was their job. But the emerald was my job.

Warm, scented breath curled around the back of my neck. She loved to be near me, that girl. I reached for her hand, then dropped it quickly when I heard Mrs. Hadley scream. She was fumbling at her neck — her suddenly bare neck.

There was a clatter as the big stone, chain and all, fell to the parquet floor.

"My emerald," she gasped. I took a step forward involuntarily, and then stood still, cursing inwardly for making myself conspicuous.

But some old johnny came to her rescue — and mine. Scooping up the stone from the floor, he handed it back to her with a bow. The thing danced in green fire at the end of the chain. The old lady practically snatched it from his hands, muttered some few words of thanks, and turned toward the stairs.

I watched her go, wondering what my next move was. Fingers fondled my arm. My little friend inched closer. We were alone in the palm shadow.

"I've been thinking . . ." Her husky whisper trailed off.

"Yes?" I was scarcely thinking of her. My mind was on the emerald.

As she smiled, her eyes were half-closed, like those of a sleepy cat. "With a man like you," she said softly, "a girl sort of expects things to happen." It was right on the line. She was asking for it. Emerald or not, I couldn't resist.

The white softness of her skin and the invitation in her eyes were all I could see. Handling her shoulders, I put my lips to hers so hard that I drew blood in my mouth. She wilted, twisted away, and broke free.

"Oh." It was as close to a genuine gasp as this girl would ever get in her life. Then she smiled. "Fix your mouth," she said.

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She carried a funny little fur muff in her hand. She fished out a mirror. Then: "Wait for me," she whispered. "This won't take long. If you want, you can drop me home."

She disappeared toward the stairs and I was left dabbling lipstick off my mouth. Then I swore. The stone! What a chump I was to let it go like that. Playing lover boy when all the time that emerald was vanishing up that stairway!

Stuffing my handkerchief back in my pocket, I reached the stairs in a cautious, broken-field run through a crowd of footmen, drunks, and dames. I took the stairs fast, heading for the third floor. The sight of Mrs. Hadley coming down delayed me at the second landing. Fortunately, she was staring straight ahead and I was able to hide behind a convenient statue. I watched her puff by on her way back to the party. Then I resumed my trek up to the third floor, my mind reviewing the floor plan that I had committed to memory.

Reaching the third floor, I went down a short hallway to the left, then a long one to the right. Sure enough, the glow from a night lamp showed over the transom of the end room. I tiptoed down to it and swung the door ajar noiselessly. By the lamp's yellow light I saw a figure with the grace of a panther.

The wall safe was open and the emerald dangled from her hand. The picture became clear then. That kiss had been a plant, giving her an excuse to break away from me and follow Mrs. Hadley upstairs. After seeing Mrs. Hadley stash the stone away, she waited until the coast was clear and then sneaked in and fingered the safe.

I moved into the doorway. "Pretty," I said. "Very pretty."

She turned, and her eyes flattened. Her mouth was a scarlet line. "I asked you to wait," she said coolly. "Mrs. Hadley's a little upset, and she asked me to see that this gets tucked away safely. Wait downstairs, will you, like a nice lad?"

Her gesture of dismissal was worthy of Mrs. Hadley herself, but I shook my head and smiled. "Oh, no, beautiful. This nice lad wouldn't think of leaving you at a time like this."

She balled the emerald up in her hand and put her fist into the little muff. I moved toward her. "You'll change your mind if you know what's good for you," she said. I was close enough now to see the green lights flickering in her eyes.

"Fast worker," I said admiringly. "You even got your lipstick fixed."

"Quit being cute." Her voice cut like a January wind. "The police don't appreciate it."

"The police?" I felt myself go tense.

The corner of her mouth twisted. "Listen, my hard-kissing friend, I've had your number all evening," she said. "You couldn't let this stone out of your sight, could you?" She paused, then let me have it hard. "It may be of interest for you to know that there are several of my operatives here tonight. Not one of them rates less

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than heavyweight honors. Like most big-money social affairs, this party is under the protection of the Gloria Crawford Agency —"

I let that sink in. "Oh," I said, "and you —"

"I am Gloria Crawford."

That was Surprise Number One. Surprise Number Two was the dainty little automatic that she flicked out of the muff. Surprise Number Three — and this was for her — was the fact that I moved in time.

A slug whistled over me, and then I had her wrists, forcing the gun and the emerald to the floor. She struggled furiously, with her clenched teeth showing, but it was no use. The noise of the shot had broken up the party. I could hear the sound of voices and footsteps hurrying down the hall toward us.

"Baby," I said regretfully. "You and your Martini *and* your lovin' — they were fun, but they didn't fool me, not for a minute. And when it comes to your being Gloria Crawford — well, Gloria couldn't make it tonight. She's home having a baby. It's our first."

NEXT MONTH . . .

5 prize-winning stories, including —

A. H. Z. Carr's IF A BODY . . .
Edgar Pangborn's MRRRAR!

the Black Mask section will consist of —

John L. Hayward's 'BYE, 'BYE, DARLING (an original)
Norman Katkov's THE FIX

and 7 other fine tales of crime and detection, including —

Cornell Woolrich's CINDERELLA AND THE MOB
Lawrence G. Blochman's CALENDAR GIRL

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Aljean Meltsir's "Doublecross" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Eighth Annual Contest. We shall tell you nothing about the story itself, except to warn you that it is deceptively clever and to urge you to read the story clear through to the end — don't dare stop anywhere in the middle! The author is in her early twenties, a graduate of Stanford University where she majored in journalism and was first in her class of 1500 students. She is Phi Beta Kappa, was managing editor of the campus newspaper, and worked her way through school by what she calls "hashing." Does that mean serving food? If so, you never saw a prettier waitress in any college in the country! (Miss Aljean Meltsir, conscious of her unusual name, sent us a photograph to prove that the name was not a pseudonymous invention.) And when we tell you that in the time-honored tradition of most great literary figures, Miss Meltsir started writing at the age of six — her first story was "a bloodthirsty epic about a talking dog that was captured by cannibals" — we think you will agree with us that this Stanford alumna should go far in journalism and writing.

DOUBLECROSS

by ALJEAN MELTSIR

MR. ARTHUR COLTON HAD COME 2000 miles, had crossed the Allegheny, Susquehanna, Illinois, Mississippi, and Missouri Rivers and a great many of their tributaries to repay the loss of an arm. Strictly speaking, an arm ought to be repaid by an arm, but Mr. Colton, calculating six years of interest on the debt, had decided that one life was proper payment.

It was a debt of honor, and he was an honorable man. His sense of honor was the one thing he had retained from an excellent college education. He had always considered himself an honorable man, had always divided his loot equitably among his associates. It was for this reason that the doublecross of Jackrabbit Durward had embittered him.

Reflecting, Mr. Colton lit a cigarette awkwardly with his left hand. Everything that he did with his left hand was awkward. But professionally, Jackrabbit Durward's bullet had actually been an asset. Leaving second-story work to other men, Mr. Colton had entered the confidence racket, where his horn-rimmed glasses,

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small, pudgy body, and awkward fumbling had quickly made him a success. People seemed to want to give their money to the ill-fated, balding gentleman with only one arm.

The train pulled into the station, and Arthur Colton looked at his wrist watch. It was almost 6. A little dust — the legacy of a rainless summer — swirled at his feet. He hoped it would be a dark night.

He walked down the town's main street with the interest of a man who has never before been farther west than Pittsburgh. He smiled at a group of young girls in front of the drug store. He looked inside the bank at the merchants depositing their week's receipts. He listened to two farmers talking about crops. He was interested in everything. At the thought of Jackrabbit as a farmer, he smiled — a kindly, heart-warming smile. And yet being a farmer had been successful for Jackrabbit. It had taken Colton six years to trace him.

Arthur Colton was not in the least secretive about being in town. When he had seen everything of interest on the main street, he toured the other streets. It was too early to go about his business, and it was pleasant to wander around. He saw some rather astonishing roses. He had always been a rose-fancier. In fact, in his athletic youth he had refused to rob a certain house when he found a group of extraordinary rose bushes in the garden.

Now he thoroughly enjoyed his browsing. In the last six years he had learned that human beings are only interested in themselves, and he quite seriously thought that he could lead a bear down the main street of the town without attracting any special notice from farmers immersed in politics and from housewives planning dinner in their heads.

Arthur Colton did not expect to be caught. Jackrabbit Durward had taken a new name and a new wife when he had moved west. The new wife had quickly tired of rural delights and had headed farther west with a less wealthy but more generous husband. From prudence, Durward had cut all his old friends, and there was nothing but a set of fingerprints to identify him with the lower circle of a large eastern city. Arthur Colton did not expect the townspeople to think it decent to check on the fingerprints of one of their leading citizens.

But for all his poise, Arthur Colton was a little nervous. He ran his fingers through his thick black hair. He had never killed a man before. He felt the knife pressing into his hard, lean stomach, and the steel chilled him. Then he considered the issue in another way and relaxed. He was only soliciting payment for a long-standing debt.

It was now quite dark, and the roofs of the houses were obscured by the blackness. Still, Arthur waited. It was not yet time. It had been Wednesday, September 11, at 8:52

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P.M. when Jackrabbit's doublecross had reached its deafening climax. It would be Wednesday, September 11, at exactly 8:52 when Colton would exact payment.

Colton looked up. There was no moon and even the stars were covered by clouds. Cautiously he began to walk, bending his tall frame double when someone came into a yard across the road. He must not be noticed, and sweat tickled the back of his head as he crouched. Whoever it was had only stepped out for a breath of air. Colton could not see, but he heard a screen door close, and he straightened up again.

He left the main road then, cutting across fields, circling and recircling, crossing the dry stream-bed of the town's small creek. He arrived at his destination at 8:40.

The farm was quiet. Colton slid into the barn and prodded the cows into uneasiness. Restlessly they lowed. Colton waited for Jackrabbit to come into the barn to find out what was the matter.

The kitchen door opened and for one moment the back steps of the farmhouse were framed in light. Jackrabbit stood there, confident, ugly, annoyed at having to investigate what was troubling the stupid cows. Annoyed only. Not frightened. Not alarmed. That was consistent with Colton's theory of human nature. Six years was too long for any man to remain frightened.

Jackrabbit had entered the barn now, but Colton did not use his knife. It lacked a few minutes of the proper time, and besides, a man was entitled to know who was exacting payment.

"You shouldn't have dropped all your old friends when you became wealthy," Colton said. "It shows lack of breeding."

There was no answer except the restless murmurs of the cows.

"Have you spent it all? How, I wonder? Making monthly business trips to the big cities and then coming back to be a model farmer?"

"I didn't . . ." The voice tried huskily to say something and then stopped.

Arthur Colton smiled warmly. "I'm not asking for the money back. That's included in the debt."

"What debt?" The voice sounded less hoarse, as though the paralysis of shock were wearing off.

"I have it all figured out here somewhere." Arthur Colton pushed up his coat sleeve. His arm was bare from his elbow to the tasteful signet ring on his little finger. "Here is my tally," he said and drew his knife.

"I don't . . ."

"Please let me finish," Arthur Colton said in the prim fashion of a schoolteacher. "You owe me $7,298 plus 4 per cent interest on that for six years, roughly $1,750; doctor and hospital expenses amounting to about $1,000, one arm, on which the interest is not easily calculable, and endless mental anguish." His voice changed. "Your life will adequately cancel out the debt, I think."

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Jackrabbit Durward suddenly realized what the prim voice was saying. He began to run, but it was too late.

Arthur Colton walked the 50 feet that separated him from the body and looked down. He thought for a moment of looking for Jackrabbit's wallet, quite probably a well-filled wallet. He eliminated the thought instantly. The debt had already been paid, and Arthur Colton was an honorable man.

Before entering the railroad station Arthur Colton stopped to straighten his tie and scrape the mud off his shoes. Then he boarded the 10:15 train. He joined a group of businessmen who were in the club car and complimented them on their county. They bought him a drink and asked him his business.

"I came to collect a bad debt. It's awful how dishonest some people are." He smiled at his companions. "Man bought some mining stock from me and refused to pay my commission when the mine struck a rich vein."

He showed the stock certificates casually to his companions. They were very interested. They bought him another drink.

Mr. Arthur Colton had a very profitable journey home.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I do not hope to have deceived the creators of Ellery Queen (EDITORS' NOTE: We hasten to confess that we were completely fooled!). So I will assume that you have already discovered that *Doublecross* is a doublecross only on the reader.

I am afraid that the average detective-story reader is getting to be a lazy chap, who prepares for his murders with a good dinner and a comfortable couch. He is good-naturedly inclined to believe anything an author tells him, and the authors have lately been taking advantage of this good-nature by inventing monstrous coincidences and solutions which introduce five new characters on the next-to-last page.

Doublecross is an experiment to see how far an author can go. As a story, it is contradictory, improbable, and, in some places, impossible.

Arthur Colton is described as tall and short, pudgy and lean. He is balding and yet he has thick black hair. He looks at the merchants of the town banking their week's receipts on a Wednesday in a bank that is curiously open at 6 o'clock in the evening. Dust from a dry summer swirls at his feet and he crosses the dry bed of a creek, yet he must scrape mud from his shoes when he returns to the railroad station.

He has never been in this town before, but he can leave the main road and accurately cut across fields, make tortuous circles, traverse creeks

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— *all in total darkness!* — and still arrive at his destination at the right time. He looks at his wrist watch when he enters town and his knowledge of the time is important afterwards, but at a crucial point his arm — his only arm — *is bare from elbow to fingers!* It would also be extremely improbable, to say the least, for the same date to fall on the same day six years later.

He cannot easily light a cigarette with his left hand, but he can throw a knife well enough to hit a man *50 feet away in total darkness!* There is no moon, the stars are clouded over, and the fact that it is completely dark is mentioned in five different ways. I do not believe that anyone could throw a knife well enough to kill a man instantly while he is running away at full speed and in complete darkness. I do not think anyone in his right mind would even attempt it.

To tally my own experiment and see if the story was cunningly enough contrived, I have tried it on several inveterate readers of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. The average result was ¾ of one error caught per reader. For example, one caught no mistakes at all; another realized that the man was both tall and short; another realized that he was balding and had thick hair. No one realized that the story as a whole could not have taken place anywhere on this planet!

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Say Not "A Small Event"

— ROBERT BROWNING

We are often asked the question: "Which is the best book of detective stories ever written?" And after more than a century of the modern form, the answer remains the same. As G. K. Chesterton once wrote: "I do not think that America has ever lost that great Challenge Cup won long ago by one of her first literary champions; or rather designed by him with a craftsmanship that was entirely original . . . In other words, I do not think that the standard set by a certain Mr. Edgar A. Poe . . . has ever been definitely and indisputably surpassed."

Nevertheless, it would be easier to answer the question if it were changed to "Which are the four best books of detective short stories ever written?" — as it would be easier still to nominate the 40 best.

The four best? Can there be any real doubt as to the answer? In our opinion, two were written by Americans and two by Englishmen. The very best and the most important (not always the same thing) is, of course, Edgar Allan Poe's TALES, *containing the three immortal stories about Dupin; and second to Poe's* TALES, *by an American writer, is Melville Davisson Post's* UNCLE ABNER. *The best and most important British book of detective short stories also, in our opinion, admits of no disagreement — surely it is Arthur Conan Doyle's* THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES; *and second to that masterwork, by a British author, is G. K. Chesterton's* THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN.

As we once said in QUEEN'S QUORUM *(of beloved memory): "These four books are the finest in their field — the* crème du crime; *they are an out-of-this-world target for future detective-story writers to take shots at — but it will be like throwing pebbles at the Pyramids" . . .*

Now, all the Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, and Father Brown short stories are known, and it has long been believed that the eighteen Uncle Abner stories, included in the only volume ever published about the "protector of the innocent and righter of wrongs," represent all the stories Melville Davisson Post ever wrote about his famous Jeffersonian squire. That one and only volume first appeared in 1918, and to the best of our knowledge it is the only book of detective short stories which has not only been kept in print all these years but has never been taken out of its original edition —

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no, there has never been a "cheap" reprint of the Uncle Abner book.

But what is not generally known is that nearly ten years after Uncle Abner made his debut between covers, his creator wrote another series of tales about that stalwart, rugged "voice and arm of the Lord." This new series included three short stories, and we are happy to inform you that EQMM has been given the extra-special privilege (and we use the adjective advisedly) of printing these three tales for the very first time since they originally appeared in "The Country Gentleman" in 1927.

Imagine, three "new" Uncle Abner stories! Only three other 'tec triples could match or top that — three new tales of Dupin (although we would settle for one), three new adventures of Sherlock Holmes, or three new innocent intuitions of Father Brown . . .

Here, then, is the first of the "new" Uncle Abner stories — one of the finest in the entire saga — and bearing the perfect title for a murder investigation by that grand old Virginia gentleman and biblical scholar . . .

THE GOD OF THE HILLS

by MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

ABNER USED TO SAY THAT ONE riding on a journey was in God's hand.

He never knew what lay before him; death standing in the road, invisible, as before the prophet; or a kingdom as in the case of Saul. One set out with his little intention, and found himself a factor in some large affair.

It is certain that my uncle had no idea of what he would come into when he rode on this early summer morning to Judge Bensen's house. It was some distance through the hills and he traveled early, with the dawn. He wished an hour with Bensen before the judge rode in to the county seat; for it was in the court term, and Bensen was the circuit judge.

It was a custom remaining in Virginia after the dominion of King George had passed.

The circuit judges were persons of property and distinction. They traveled on their circuits, holding their courts here and there about the country. There would be a group of counties in a circuit. And the county seat would take its name, not infrequently from the fact that it was the domicile of these circuit courts. One finds the

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name remaining — Culpepper Court House, and the like.

Land was the evidence and insignia of distinction in Virginia.

One's importance was measured by his acres.

Every man who would command the attention of his fellows stood on an estate in lands. Judge Bensen lived some miles from the county seat. He had got a thousand acres from his father, and added to it. He had never married. He lived alone, with Negro servants, in their whitewashed quarters, at some distance from his ancient house. His earnings and his salary from the state went to the purchase of new lands.

He had introduced the Hereford, and turning aside from the customs of the men about him, he bred young cattle, instead of fattening the beef bullock for the market. It happened then that Bensen's young cattle were not easily to be equaled. If one bought from him one got a drove of bullocks of one type, with no mongrel to be sold off to the little trader. Bensen had 200 young cattle — stockers, as they were called — for sale. And my uncle went, early, on this summer morning to see the drove; and to buy the cattle if he could, before Bensen set out for his court — on his horse with his legal papers in his saddle bags.

It was scarcely daylight when Abner descended into the long valley that extended north to the county seat, and in which lay the Bensen lands. At the foot of the hill where the road entered the valley he came on a man sitting his horse in the road. It was early, an hour before the sun, and there was a vague mist in this lowland.

The man and the horse looked gigantic.

Beyond them through an avenue of trees was the heavy outline of a house, still dark, from which the life within it had not yet awakened to the new day.

The whole earth was dry and the road bedded down with dust. My uncle was almost on the man before he knew him. It was Adam Bird, a traveling preacher of the hills, on his gray mare. The big old man was sitting motionless in his saddle looking up through the avenue of maples toward the shadowy house. He did not hear my uncle's horse in the soft dust until it was nearly on him. His hands lay on the pommel of his saddle and his face was lifted like one in some deep reflection.

He called out when he saw my uncle.

"Abner," he said, "do you see that house."

He did not pause for a reply from Abner nor for any formality of salutation. He went on, and directly, as though he merely uttered now aloud the thing that was passing in his mind.

"Caleb Greyhouse lived there until the devil took him. He married Virginia Lewis — for a woman when she is young will be a fool. She is long dead but she left a daughter that is a

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Lewis too. Not a Greyhouse, by the mercy of God! And now Abner," and he brought one of his big hands, clenched, down on the pommel of the saddle, "these accursed judges are going to dispossess her of her inheritance!"

My uncle knew what the man meant. It was common knowledge. Caleb Greyhouse had left a will written some years before, when the girl was young, leaving his estate, houses and lands, to his daughter, with a bequest to his brother who was to be the guardian and administrator of it. It had been written by Coleman Northcote, one of the best lawyers in Virginia, and so remained, until the girl had grown up. Then, when she had fallen in love, and wished to marry the son of a neighbor with whom Greyhouse had quarreled over a few acres of ridge land, the irascible old man had added a codicil to the will giving the whole estate to his brother, and no dollar and no acre to the girl.

The case was before the circuit court, now sitting, for the girl had got a sort of lawyer, and brought a suit.

But she had no money and no case.

Northcote had written the will only too accurately, with precise care for every technical detail. The codicil added by Greyhouse followed the form in Mayo's Guide. It was written and signed by the testator and contained no legal flaw. There seemed nothing that any court could do. Nevertheless, Bensen had called in a judge from a neighboring circuit to sit with him and decide the case. The case was before the judges. And it was the act of these judges and the case before them that moved the traveling preacher of the hills.

"Did Bensen decide the case?" replied my uncle.

"He did not," said Bird, "but the judge with him clamored to decide it and have done, for he wished to go back to his circuit. Bensen delayed a little for he had a plan of his own about this thing. He said he would write an opinion and they would decide today. But it was an abominable pretension, Abner. They will dispossess the girl . . . unless the Lord God Almighty moves somewhere in this thing."

Again his big hand descended on the pommel of his saddle, as though he pounded the timber of a pulpit.

"And He will move in it! It is so written in The Book. If the widow and the orphan cry to me I will surely hear their cry."

He brought his big hand up and over his face and his voice descended into a lower note.

"She came to me and said, 'Uncle Adam, will you pray for me to win my case.' And I said I will not pray; for I will not supplicate the Lord God Almighty to do justice. I will call His attention to this wrong. . . . And I stood up and cried to Him! And the word of the Lord came to me. And I saddled my horse, and rode down here and called Bensen out. He came

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shuffling with his little lawyer talk. It was the law. He had no discretion. He could not help the wrong of it. And besides I was in contempt of his court to talk with him about the case. In contempt of his court, Abner!"

And again the old man made his powerful dramatic gesture.

"I, the servant of God, in contempt of his court when I protested against a wrong! . . . I told Bensen that he was in contempt of God's court, and that if he went forward with this injustice Jehovah would include him in the damnation that followed after it."

He paused and looked my uncle in the face.

"For Bensen, Abner, is not guiltless in this thing. He will profit by it. He has coveted these lands as we all know and tried to purchase them. Old Caleb Greyhouse would not sell. But this brother will sell. And Bensen will get the lands he covets."

And again the old man returned to his dramatic vigor.

"And he shall not escape the damnation that followed Ahab the King of Samaria; because he takes the land he covets through the act of another.

"The writing of clerks and the seals of courts shall not bring it to him guiltless, even as the writing of Jezebel and the sealing thereof did not bring the lands that he coveted to Ahab guiltless. . . . I go now, Abner, as Elijah went to the King of Samaria! And if he say like that other, 'Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' I will answer, I have found thee!"

He made a great sweeping gesture and turned his horse north in the valley. He rode as though he rode alone in the vague mist that lifted from the lowland and hung above the fields; a thin gray smoke screen spreading over like a blanket.

The old man had not asked whither my uncle rode nor to what end.

He went like one on some tremendous mission, alone.

Abner followed. The circuit rider had brought a new element into this affair. A gain to Bensen at the end of it that my uncle had not considered. But now that the point was touched on he remembered. It was common knowledge that it was a covetous intent with Bensen to extend his lands; to add a field. He had endeavored to buy the Greyhouse tract. And it was the truth that while Caleb Greyhouse would not sell, this brother who took the estate under the written codicil would sell it to the last acre. He had sold all that he had received from his father as an inheritance except a few acres and a house on the highway near the Bensen residence.

There was a dissolute, a reckless strain in the man that was not in Caleb Greyhouse.

He wished to be a factor in political affairs, and lacking the confidence of the people he attached his fortunes to other men; and so he had got to be a sort of deputy about the courthouse, and a chimney-corner lawyer, with knowledge enough to thumb through

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the deed books searching for some defect in a title upon which he could bring a suit; or extort a blackmail.

He had a marked pride in this pretension.

In the suit before the judges on the will he appeared with much visible ostentation for himself. There was, as it happened, little peril to his case, for the girl, with no money to hire a competent attorney, had only a chimney-corner lawyer like himself. And so the case was one for judges to decide as it appeared, on its face, before them. . . . Bensen would get the land. This Barnes Greyhouse, in funds, would try for the Assembly of Virginia. And with money he might win. There was here, as in every land, an element of the electorate that could be persuaded by a demagogue and a little money in the hand.

My uncle rode on after the old preacher, his big chestnut horse moving noiselessly in the deep dust.

But his heart was troubled.

The girl came up sharply outlined in his memory: fair-haired and slender, with the hope and the charm of the immortal morning. There was no reason why she should not go, in joy, to the youth she loved.

He was of a better family and a better blood than Greyhouse.

Because that irascible old man had quarreled with the boy's father about some acres of stony land along a ridge line, everyone of the blood was damned. All were enemies, and endowed by that enmity with every vice.

Old Greyhouse would have no marriage with his enemy.

He fell into a fury of wild talk at the mere mention of it. And on a certain night, heated in that fury, he had written out the codicil that divested his daughter of his estate. It was not certain that at the bottom of the man he, in fact, wished to make that alienation.

In anger, affection is sometimes over-ridden.

Perhaps if he had had time, in illness, for reflection, he would have canceled it. Blood, as the old adage said, was thicker than water when death approached and one came to pass on the material things that one had gathered together in one's life.

But he had no such time.

Death came on him in the fields.

He had fallen, in harvest, at a stroke of sun. The farm hands carried him in. But he was already out of life. He lay for some hours in a coma, in his daughter's arms. Once, as the field hands told, he tried to stroke her hair and make known to her something that moved vaguely in his mind.

But he had had his hour, and he was granted no extension.

What he had written, he had written.

Death would not release his hand to cancel it.

It was the old eternal story.

Men acted in their anger to do wrong, as though they had a privilege of life; as though at their wish or need, in extremity, they would be

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granted a stay of execution until they could set their affairs in order and adjust any wrong they had accomplished.

The day was breaking.

The fog, extended through the valley, was lifting and parting into long streamers of white mist. The hills in the distance were sharp and clear in the morning light. In a short time the sun would appear. Already in the fields the cattle were at pasture.

My uncle had come up with the traveling preacher.

And at once when the big chestnut emerged from the mist by his gray mare, the old man began to talk. He began, as before, with no introductory sentence.

"Abner," he said, "your father lived long in this land, and he did good in the sight of the Lord and not evil. And I can name a hundred other men like him who have stood for righteousness. But in that company there is no Greyhouse. Old Caleb was the best. He was hard and mean but he was not a liar nor a thief. But this other, this Barnes Greyhouse, is the worst of an evil generation. His hands are full of evil. Did not little Benny Wilmoth, in despair, shoot himself in his house because this creature searching through the deed books found a defect in his title and brought a suit to dispossess him of his farm. It was a sort of murder, Abner!"

He thrust his clenched hand out.

"There was no law to hale Barnes Greyhouse into the court and hang him. But was he any less guilty for that lack? The hand of Virginia could not reach him. But, Abner, is he beyond God's hand? By little twists and turns a nimble man may slip away from the law. But he will not slip away from the vengeance of God."

His clenched hand made a great sweeping curve, as though it cleared a swathe before him.

"Abner," he said, "I will not be silent before this outrage. I will call Bensen to his door and warn him. I have seen it in a dream. He is a party to this wrong, and the Lord will make his house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat . . . and this Barnes Greyhouse!" He spread out the fingers of his extended arm as in the pronouncement of a curse. "As the dogs licked up the blood of Ahab in the pool of Samaria, shall the dogs lick up his blood! . . . for in shame, and in blackness, and in violence shall he go out of life!"

My uncle did not reply. This old man of the hills who stood for righteousness, like all who give themselves wholly to some principle of honor, had the dignity of the thing behind him. And he was not afraid. Neither courts nor judges could overawe him.

My uncle was in a deep reflection. He knew of this matter what was current gossip in the hills. But he did not know, until this morning, the sweeping terms in which Caleb Greyhouse, in his anger, had written out the codicil to his will. It would be, he had imagined, a sort of guardianship

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in the brother over the girl's estate until she came to a legal age, or some manner of a trust. With such a writing there would be hope. But with a direct bequest in terms there would be no hope.

He was in a great perplexity and his mind turned from the mission on which he came.

It was broad day now with the sun beginning to appear.

They drew near to Bensen's house.

In the pasture by the road strolling down to water at the brook were the drove of young Hereford cattle. They were unequaled; as like in form and coloring as though they were all born of one mother, by some miracle of maternity on the same day of the year, and so reared and suckled. No cattleman of the hills could have passed that drove and not pulled up his horse to look it over, for in his mind's eye, after that, he would have carried the model for all other young cattle in the world.

And yet my uncle did not pull up his horse.

The two men passed in silence and, making a sharp turn in the road beside some oak trees, came to Bensen's house. They stopped in wonder. The house was open; the Negroes were hovering about as in a panic. Randolph's gig was before the door. He came out when they appeared.

"Abner," he said, "you are come, and I was about to send a Negro for you. Bensen is dead!

"You arrive also, Adam," he said, "as at a direction of God. It is the house of death that you have come to, and it is one of the duties of the preacher of the Gospels to minister to the dead. Come in."

"I will not come in," replied the old man. "But I will get down and sit before the door, for I did not come in peace."

But my uncle cried out astonished.

"Dead!" he echoed. "Bensen dead, what killed him?"

"Now, that," replied Randolph, "is the mystery that I was about sending after you to solve. Bensen was killed in the night as he sat here in his library at work among his books."

On the way in with Abner, Randolph explained the details of what had happened.

The circuit court was sitting.

The case over the will of Caleb Greyhouse was on the docket.

For some reason Bensen wished another judge to sit with him to decide the case and so had called in West from a neighboring circuit. There was no reason for this, Randolph said, for there was no ground on which to contest the will. Coleman Northcote had written it some years before. Northcote was the best chancery lawyer in Virginia, and he made no errors in a legal paper. The will was correctly drawn, signed by the testator, and witnessed as the law required.

Later, Caleb Greyhouse had added a codicil in his own handwriting, on the blank sheet of the will. The codicil followed the form in Mayo's Guide and was signed, dated, and

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sealed in every feature, also as the law required.

Of course, this attack on the will broke down at once.

There was no technical error in it.

The codicil added below the will on the same sheet of foolscap was also unassailable. It followed the legal form, was written by the testator in his own hand, and signed by him.

It became thus, under the law of Virginia, a holograph will and required no witnesses.

West wanted to decide the case at once from the bench, so he could get back to his circuit. But Bensen said they would take it under advisement until morning.

That night all the Negroes about the place went to a frolic at the county seat.

They left the judge at work in his library, when they went out at dark.

In court time it was the custom of the judge to work late over his legal papers and so they had put new candles in the sticks on his table and lighted them before they left the house. They had been delayed in setting out, and as they left the house the judge had come to the door and directed them to stop on the way and ask Barnes Greyhouse to come and see him.

The man lived not farther than a quarter of a mile along the road.

They gave the message and saw him take his hat and cane and set out.

The frolic ran late. It was well toward dawn when the servants returned.

There was no light in Bensen's library or about the house and they naturally assumed that the judge had put out the lights and gone to bed.

In the morning when they came into the house they found the tragedy, and in terror sent for Randolph.

He found the library as the assassin had left it, for the Negroes had not gone in.

The judge had been killed as he sat before his table. He had been struck down from behind, apparently without warning. The assassin had used the poker from the fireplace. It was a terrific blow for it had crushed in the skull. The man had fallen sidewise under the table, for a second blow aimed at him had struck the table itself, leaving an indentation in the walnut wood.

The iron fire-poker lay on the floor behind the chair in which the judge had been sitting.

The deed had been done late, for the candles had burned down almost to the cup of the sticks before they had been extinquished. They had been snuffed out.

Randolph pointed out the iron poker, the mark on the walnut table, and the blood smear on the hardwood floor where the judge had fallen. Abner looked carefully about the room. And while he thus studied the situs of the crime, Randolph gave his opinion.

"This, Abner," he said, "will be the work of some vindictive convict. Our circuit judges are always in peril from these creatures when they come

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back from the penitentiary. I have seen them, when they were sentenced, scowl hard at the judges and mutter what they would do in revenge when they should at length go free.

"This will be the work of such a creature. Bensen, in the counties of his circuit, will have sentenced all sorts of men for all sorts of felonies.

"But it is a peril of honor, Abner. And the one who dies from it dies in the service of his country, as though he died in battle before her enemies."

My uncle did not reply.

But there came a voice through the open door in answer.

The voice of the old circuit rider sitting in the sun.

"He did not die in honor, Randolph. Bensen died as a dog dieth!"

Randolph made a gesture as of one who dismisses the extravagances of a child with whom he will not contend. He got out some sheets of paper and sat down at a corner of the table to make a note of the details of the tragedy, accurately as he had found them on this morning.

Abner remained standing by the table, his big hand gathered about his chin, looking at the two tall candlesticks, with their bits of candles burned down to the cups.

New tallow candles had been put in on this night. These candles would burn long, almost from the dark till morning. They had been put in new on this night, and there was only a fragment left when the assassin had snuffed them out.

It was some time before my uncle moved, then he took up the snuffers and with the sharp point lifted the bits of candle out of the cups of the candlesticks.

But he did not otherwise disturb them.

He replaced them as they had been, put down the snuffers at their place, and went over to the far corner of the room.

There lying in the corner was a thing that he had noticed but upon which he had made no comment.

It was a small fragment of wood.

At first he had thought it a chip from the table, broken off by the impact of the blow that had been directed at Bensen as he fell forward under it. But the table was walnut, and this fragment was of some dark wood of a close texture. He did not take it up, nor disturb it where it lay in the corner, but he stooped over and studied it intently.

He arose, went over to the fireplace.

He took up the iron poker and turned it about in his hand.

There was a coating of ashes on the poker, extending from the point halfway to the handle, and over this toward the point was the blood of the man who had been murdered.

Abner put the poker down and remained for some moments by the hearth.

No fire had been lighted in it on this night. But there was a heap of wood ashes where former fires had burned.

Abner looked about him.

Randolph wrote sitting at a corner

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of the table with his back toward him. The old circuit rider was invisible beyond the open door; the Negroes had withdrawn in frightened groups beyond the house.

There was no one to question the thing he did — for he was not yet ready to be questioned — and kneeling down on the brick hearth he put his hand into the heap of ashes.

Then he withdrew his hand, smoothed the surface of the heap as it had been, dusted the ashes from his hand, and rose.

He went around Randolph to the door and stepped out.

It was early in the morning.

No one had arrived, for the servants when they had found Bensen dead had sent word only to Randolph, through the hills. And Abner and old Adam had come by chance.

Abner did not pause.

He went on across the grassplot to the road. He stopped there and looked carefully about.

Then he walked north in the dust of the road, in the direction of the county seat. He went slowly, pausing now and then, and retracing now and then a step. Finally he stopped, advanced, returned, and stood still.

There was a little wood of scrub oak on his right hand, and a rail fence. He crossed the fence and began to look about in this tangle of scrub oak.

It was some time, perhaps half an hour, before he got back to the house.

There was a haircloth sofa, facing toward a bookcase in a far corner of the room. Abner went past Randolph to the sofa and leaning over the back put down on it something that he had brought with him, concealed under his long coat.

He returned to the table where Randolph sat before his sheets of paper.

The man had been so taken up with what he wrote that he had not marked my uncle's absence.

Abner put out his hand and took up, from beyond Randolph, a law book with a cracked back. It was a volume of early legal reports.

The book fell open midway of the volume where the back was cracked.

And when my uncle saw the page before him his face changed.

He read and his features hardened.

He was about to speak when the voice of a man entering from the road stopped him.

It was Barnes Greyhouse.

He was a big man with a heavy brutal face laid over with a sort of fawning geniality. He walked with a slight limp, for in some drunken brawl, at an earlier time, he had been injured.

Randolph rose as the man came in; and my uncle turned about toward the door.

But he did not move.

The man blurted out a jumble of greeting and amazed expletives at the tragedy.

"Good God!" he said. "Bensen murdered. Who could have killed him?"

My uncle did not reply.

But Randolph made a little gesture

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as of one who has penetrated to a meaning hidden from other men.

"It is the work of some convict that Bensen has sent to the penitentiary. Such creatures hold always a vindictive resentment against the judge; as though their punishment were his work."

"You are right, Randolph," said Greyhouse. "That's the explanation!"

He uttered the words as though the conclusion could not be gainsaid, and was a pronouncement in finality. But there was a sort of eagerness in the voice and manner of the man.

My uncle spoke then.

"Greyhouse," he said, "you were here last night."

The man turned with a gesture of assent.

"Yes," he said, "early in the night. The Negroes passing said Bensen wished to see me, and I walked down. But I was here for a few moments only. The judge had sent for me to say that he and West would decide the case at once when they convened in the morning, and that I should come early into the court. I left the judge as I found him, sitting at his table there, and walked home. It was early; about dark."

"Were the candles lighted on Bensen's table?" inquired my uncle.

"Yes," replied the man, "just lighted, I think, as I came in; it was about dark."

"And the candles, Greyhouse; were they new tall candles, as the Negroes say?"

"Yes, Abner," he replied, "I can answer that. They were new tall candles for I noticed the flicker of the wick where the pointed ends had not yet caught up with the tallow."

Abner leaned over the table and took up Randolph's pencil.

"That is an important fact," he said, "for fragments only of these candles were burning in the sticks when the assassin snuffed them out after the murder. I think a note should be made of your observation to confirm what the Negroes say."

He put out his hand with the pencil in his fingers to write a line on Randolph's memorandum. But he bore too heavily and the point of the pencil broke. He turned toward Greyhouse with the pencil in his hand.

"Lend me your knife," he said

The man took a penknife from his breeches pocket and handed it to my uncle. Abner opened the knife and turned back to the table. But he did not sharpen the pencil. He put down the knife and pencil on the table and stood up.

My uncle looked hard at Greyhouse.

"You think Bensen was killed, late in the night, by some vindictive assassin who slipped in behind him. Is that your belief, Greyhouse?"

"Why, yes," he said, "that is the obvious conclusion. Here are the candles burned down to the cups and the bloody poker. It is indicated in these evidences. Bensen was murdered by some released convict who had a grudge against him, and slipping

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in behind killed him with the poker."

He was interrupted by a voice; a voice big and dominant that seemed to envelop and fill up the room.

"Bensen was not killed with the poker."

The three men turned as with a single motion of their bodies.

The old circuit rider was standing in the door. Greyhouse cried out at the words.

"How do you know that?"

The old circuit rider looked hard at the man.

"I know it," he answered, "as God knows it."

Then he closed his mouth and was silent.

It was my Uncle Abner that broke the silence.

"Adam is right," he said, "Bensen was not killed with the poker, nor in the time or manner that these evidences would indicate, for they are false and set up to mislead. There is blood on this poker. But there was no blood from the fracture of the skull that killed the judge and therefore there would be no blood on the implement with which the blow was dealt. There was hemorrhage only from the dead man's face where he lay under the table. But this poker was not there. It lay on the floor behind the chair. And consequently, it was made bloody by design."

He paused and turned toward the table.

"But this," he said, "was not the first thing that puzzled me. The first thing was the aspect of these candlesticks. If new tallow candles had burned down in them to the cups, the shafts of the sticks would have been fouled over with dripping grease. They were not so fouled. The shafts of the candlesticks were clean as you see them. How could that happen? The wicks of the bits of candle had been snuffed out. That was clear. But how could the candles have burned down to these bits, and there follow no drip of tallow?

"There was a reason. And I found that reason."

He took up the iron snuffers and with their sharp point lifted the bits of candles out of the cups of the sticks. The explanation was apparent. The candles had been cut off with a knife.

There was silence and he continued:

"What had become of the candles? I searched the room here. I found a certain thing but not the candles."

He made a gesture toward a distant corner; and went on:

"I looked again at the poker. It had a coating of wood ashes on it, as though it had been thrust into the heap yonder in the fireplace. Thrust in before it had been dipped into Bensen's blood, for the coating of ashes was underneath the blood. . . . Then I found the candles."

He crossed the room with long strides, seized the poker, thrust it into the heap of ashes in the fireplace, and raked out the two long candles, cut off at their tips.

He put down the poker and stood up.

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"The whole thing was clear now. Bensen had been killed early in the night when the candles were hardly lighted, and with some implement other than this poker; by one who had acted on a sudden determination to thus kill; and after the act endeavored to falsify events. He cut off the candles and snuffed them out. He made a hole in the ashes with the poker and concealed them and then, remembering that an implement must be found, had thought of the poker in his hand, and dipping it in the man's blood laid it on the floor behind the chair."

My uncle turned toward Greyhouse.

"Greyhouse," he said, "you are the one who came here early in the evening!"

The features of the man sagged and sweated. But there was a certain courage in him.

"Abner," he cried, "you go mad with your neat little conclusions. Why should I wish Bensen's death. I of all persons would wish his life; for today he and West would decide this will case in my favor."

Again the room reverberated with a voice that filled it. Again the old circuit rider spoke.

"Greyhouse," he said, "you are a liar! . . . I saw this thing in a dream; not all, but a fragment of it. I saw you and Bensen in this room, in anger. He beat a book, opened on the table, with his clenched hand and, from behind, you advanced on him, with something in your hand . . . not the poker, for it was setting against the chimney. You are a liar!"

The big accused creature wavered.

And Abner spoke, when the old man had ended.

"Yes, Greyhouse," he said, "you are a liar. I understand the whole thing to the end, although I have had no part in Adam's vision. That which was confused and hidden is now disclosed and clear. Bensen coveted these lands and he undertook to force you to a sale; a sale that would be a sort of dividing of the loot."

He crossed to the table and opened the volume of Virginia reports at the page where it fell apart from the broken back.

"Look!" he said. "Look, Randolph. Here on this page is the syllabus of a decision of the Supreme Court of Virginia, holding that a will and its codicil must be uniform to be valid. It cannot be half in one form and half in another. If the body of the will is written by someone other than the decedent and signed and witnessed, then the codicil must be so written and signed and witnessed.

"I understand it. I understand it clearly to the end . . . Bensen found this case last night and he sent for Barnes Greyhouse and held the case over him like a club to force a sale of these lands to him at some little price. He must take the price or Bensen would bring in the case today. And so they quarreled, and Bensen beat the book for emphasis, breaking the back under his clenched hand. . . . And so Barnes Greyhouse killed

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him, knowing that West had no knowledge of this case and would decide in favor of the will, and the girl, with no money, could not take it to a higher court!"

There was utter silence. Then my uncle went on.

"Where is your cane, Greyhouse?"

The man did not reply, but his baggy face began to tremble.

"I will answer for you," continued Abner. "Listen, Greyhouse. I went over your track in the dust of the road. It was a clear track and beside it, also in the dust, was the round imprint of the ferrule of your cane. It was all along beside your tracks as you came here from your house, but on your return it was only to be seen beside your tracks for a certain distance. At the field of scrub oaks, on the right of the road, I could no longer find it. What did that mean, Greyhouse? It meant that at this point you had thrown the cane away. . . . And why did you throw it away? Because you discovered, there, on your way from this murder, that the cane with which you had killed Bensen had suffered an injury that you might be called on to explain. Look, I will show you, for I found it in the scrub-oak wood by the roadside." He took up the cane from where it was hidden by the sofa and presented it to the man. It was a big heavy crook-handled cane of black wood like teak, and a split-off fragment at the turn of the crook was missing.

"Look at it, Greyhouse," he cried. "Look at it! A piece at the turn of the crook is missing, split off when the cane struck the table, under the powerful blow that you aimed at Bensen when he went down out of the chair. And that piece of it is yonder in the corner of the room."

He crossed with great strides, picked up the fragment of wood, and placed it on the crook of the cane.

"Look, Greyhouse, how the piece fits!" He made a great gesture.

"There is other evidence against you. Why, sir, it cries like the blood of Abel . . . your knife, there on the table, has tallow on the blade where you cut the candles!"

Panic was on the trapped man and he bolted through the open door.

But his foot tripped at the sill and he fell headlong outside, on the flag-paved path. His head struck a fragment of sharp curb and a thin trickle of blood flowed out. Then he got staggeringly on his feet to escape. But my uncle overtook him and the Negroes hurried up to help pin him down.

In the confusion as they drew near, the two hounds hovering about them paused and began to lick the blood where it had trickled on the curb.

The old circuit rider — sitting motionless in the sun, his white head uncovered, his big body, clothed in its rusty-colored homespun, filling up the chair — put out his hand and pointed to the thing.

It was the fulfilling of the prophecy:

As the dogs licked up the blood of Ahab in the pool of Samaria, so shall the dogs lick up his blood.

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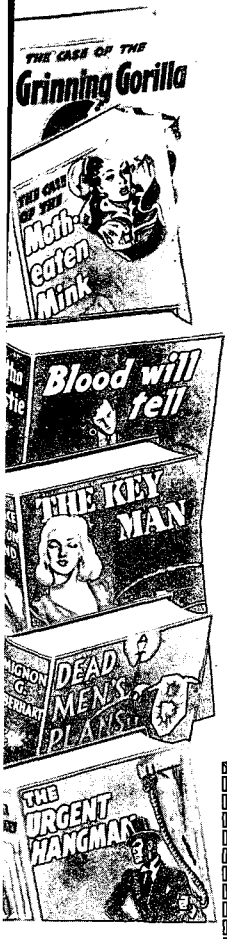

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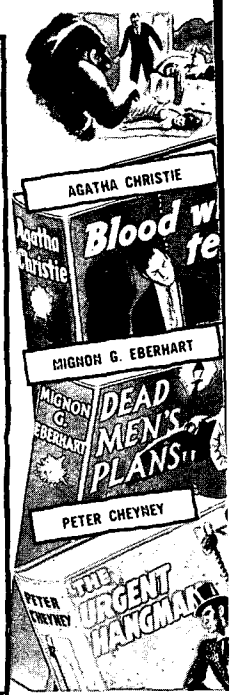

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